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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the subject of identity development during late adolescence by analyzing research from three studies: "Self-concept and questions of life: Identity development during late adolescence" (Adamson and Lyxell, 1996); "Adolescent identity--a qualitative approach: Self-concept, existential questions and adult contacts" (Adamson and Hartman, 1999); and "Identity: A developmental study of adolescents' self-concept" (Adamson, 1999). Each study asks questions pertaining to three domains: adolescents' self-concept, their existential questions, and their contacts with adult people. Identity development during late adolescence is examined through three empirical questions. First, how do adolescents perceive and describe themselves? Second, what do they consider important in their lives? Third, how do they describe their contacts with adults? Results from interviews, a personality inventory, and sentence completion tasks and question show that a majority of respondents had a positive self-image; an inconsistent self-concept was related to negative factors; existential questions concerned personal future; and adults were needed because of their experience and knowledge. Reprints of the three studies on which this thesis is based are appended. (Contains 168 references, 3 tables, and 3 figures.) (JDM)

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LIKE CIRCLES ON THE WATER

A Study of Adolescent Identity

Lena Adamson

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCE
LINKÖPINGS UNIVERSITET

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PREFACE

The present thesis is based on the following three studies, referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

I. Adamson, L. & Lyxell, B. (1996). Self-concept and questions of life: Identity development during late adolescence. *Journal of Adolescence, 19,* 569-582.

II. Adamson, L., Hartman, S. G., & Lyxell, B. (1999). Adolescent identity - a qualitative approach: Self-concept, existential questions and adult contacts. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 40,* 21-32.

III. Adamson, L. (1999). *Identity: A developmental study of adolescents' self-concept.* Manuscript submitted for publication.

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To write a thesis involves a lot of work in solitude, but, it also involves a number of people without whom the task would be impossible to accomplish. So, I would like to express my deepest gratitude, to begin with, to my supervisor Björn Lyxell and to my co-supervisor Sven G. Hartman. Thank you both for always being there, always giving good advice, always telling me to read another book and always asking me difficult questions. The two of you represent very different traditions and, admittedly, in the beginning I was convinced the only solution would be for me to write two theses. However, I gradually realized that I could not melt into your two traditions, instead I had to integrate them into my own way of thinking and working. Hopefully this is what I have done.

Next, I want to thank all the young persons who have been willing to answer my questions and share their thoughts with me. Needless to say, without you the thesis would not have existed.

To continue, the CCD group of course! Jerker Rönnberg for kind interest and valuable comments, Erik Lindberg for excellent advice on methods, and all the rest of you, including the two of you in Örebro. Our research interests are quite different from each other's. In spite of that, in addition to having enjoyed the friendly and open climate in the group, I have learnt a lot by listening to, and participating in your discussions.

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Finally, I want to acknowledge the support I have received from my family, my father, Simone, and especially Tobias, my son. I realize that living with a mother who is writing a thesis on adolescence when you are an adolescent yourself has probably been quite unbearable at times. Thank you Tobes, for handling it all so well! You have now left the period of late adolescence and moved into the world of young adults. I promise I won't write a thesis on that.

Linköping, June, 1999

Lena Adamson

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INTRODUCTION

"Who are you? said the Caterpillar...
"I – I hardly know Sir, just at present – at least I
know who I was when I got up this morning, but
I think I must have changed several times since then."
(L.Carroll, 1865)

The quotation above originates from "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll (1865/1982). Alice feels at odds with her own body. Her size seems to change all the time and she is lost in a strange, new world and "yet" she thinks, "it's curious this sort of life!". Intentionally or not, Carrol's tale very neatly describes some of the feelings that often occur within the individual during the early part of adolescence; confusion and wonder, but also, a large proportion of curiosity. The body rapidly changes and the perception of oneself varies accordingly; at one instance huge enough to fill a house – at the next, small enough for mice and rabbits to rule your life. However, during the adolescent period according to a common notion, self-perception gradually stabilizes, step by step the individual forms an identity that in turn gives structure to adulthood. This is the subject of the present thesis which includes three studies, all aimed to examine the subject of identity development during late adolescence.

The thesis can be viewed as linear in the sense that each study has given rise to the questions of the next study, but not in the sense that it unfolds like a story. It does not start with a set of clear cut questions and hypotheses, neither does it end with some final, equally clear cut, answers. Instead, each study asks its own specific questions, evolving around three domains where emphasis is placed in the written order; adolescents' self-concepts, their existential questions and their contacts with adult people. Identity development in this thesis is viewed as a reciprocal process between the individual and her socio-cultural context. Hence, the two first domains were chosen in order to study intrapersonal identity issues. That is, these questions are primarily concerned with questions within the individual her/himself. The third domain, adult contacts, focuses on interpersonal issues, that is, adolescents' thoughts and experiences of what happens between her/him and the outside world. This domain was chosen in order to better understand concurrent factors outside the individual that also may influence the process of identity development. Study I and II are connected to each other in the sense that they basically explore the same topics but in methodologically different manners. Study III focuses solely on the first domain; adolescents' self-concept development.

The outline of the thesis can be presented as follows. The questions asked can be hierarchically ordered into one overall purpose, three specific questions, and a number of empirical questions and assumptions. Thus, the overall purpose is to explore the subject of identity development during late (16 – 20 years) adolescence. This has been done by asking three specific questions, each connected to one domain; first, how do adolescents perceive and describe themselves, second, what do they consider important in their lives, and, finally, how do they describe their contacts with adult people. These three questions have in turn been elaborated in a number of empirical questions and assumptions addressed in each of the three studies. The answers to the empirical questions are presented and discussed in each study respectively, whereas issues in relation to the three domains (i.e., the three specific questions) together with the overall purpose, are addressed in the discussion and conclusion.

Identity development is, to say the least, a complex and elusive issue to study. In order to give the reader a chance to become familiar with the field and the scope of this thesis it is necessary to begin with an introduction to the following terms and issues; developmental models, adolescence, and identity theory and research. Further, in order to understand the links to the three studies, it is also necessary to give an introduction to my three domains of interest; adolescents' self-concept, existential questions and adult contacts. These two parts can be described as theoretical introductions on two levels, one general and one more closely tied to the empirical questions. Each of these are then followed by short sections where my own position and use of the discussed models, theories and terms are clarified together with the purpose of the thesis. Prior to presenting the actual studies I also discuss some philosophical considerations in relation to my choice of methods. Finally, following the sections for summaries, discussions and conclusions, I present some suggestions for future research and also discuss the results in relation to the Swedish school system.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In this section I will introduce the theoretical foundations of the thesis. Three issues will be presented and discussed; developmental models, adolescence, and identity development.

Developmental Models – Metatheoretical Aspects

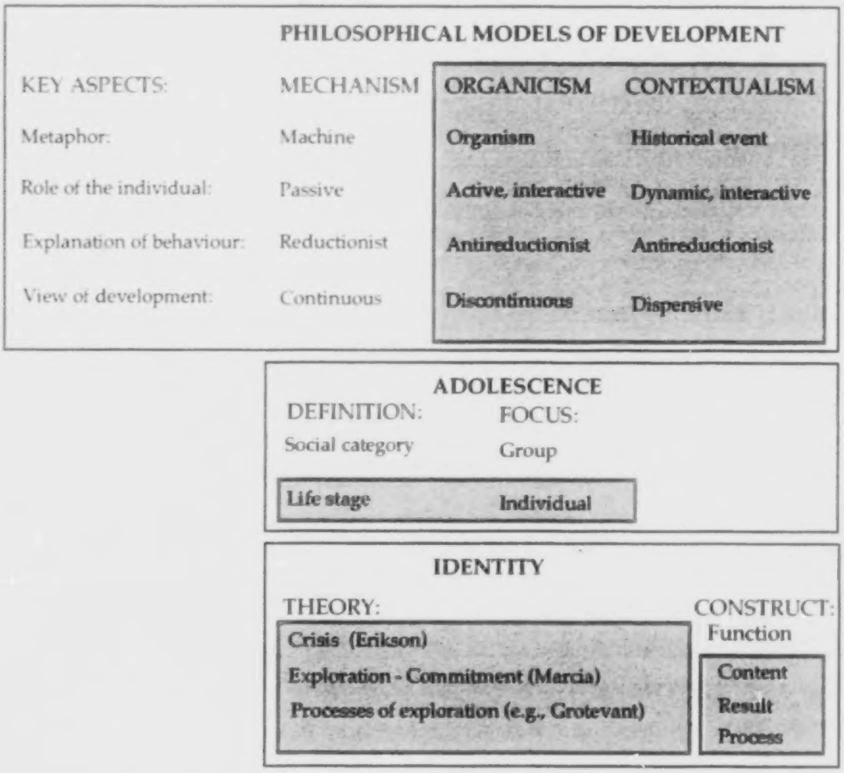
Learn your theories as well as you can,
but put them aside when you touch
the miracle of the living soul.
(C.G. Jung, 1928)

The essence of development is change. However, not all change can be considered developmental in nature. A stone that has been polished by the sea has not developed, neither do we talk of development when water turns to ice. But, when an acorn turns into a full grown oak or an infant to an adult individual we use the term development. Amongst most developmental psychologists there is consensus about development also involving some kind of organization, that is, development can be defined as *organized change* (Bosma, Graafsma, Grotevant, & de Levita, 1994). The questions of how this change is organized and what causes it, constitute two of the major issues within developmental psychology where opinions differ substantially (Cavanaugh, 1990). The first question concerns the issue of whether development is discontinuous or continuous, that is, does the organism develop through different levels of organization or does it merely become "more of the same"? The second question is whether nature or nurture causes development. That is, does an innate plan decide the developmental path of the organism or do environmental factors determine the end result? The answers to these questions are decided by what developmental model, or world view (Pepper, 1942), is chosen for frame of reference. Within developmental psychology a number of world views can be delineated, each specifying the characteristics of both people and reality and thereby defining not only what is important to study but also how this should be done. The models themselves can not be confirmed as right or wrong, true or false, they can only be accepted or rejected. However, each model gives rise to theories where model issues are translated into theoretical concepts that, in turn, become open for empirical investigation and testing. The reason for choosing one model in preference to another is, according to Cavanaugh (1990), pragmatic. That is, the choice usually falls upon the model that provides the best way of understanding the world. A world view is also rooted in the researcher's own history, experience and context in which (s)he belongs (cf. Gadamer, 1975; Liedman, 1998). Hence, the choice of world view (and the accompanying theories and methods) is not only pragmatic but also personal and contextual.

Over the years a number of different world views, (sometimes also labelled "models", "paradigms" or "traditions") have emerged within the field of developmental psychology. Reese and Overton (1970) identified mechanism and organicism as the two major models, and these are in fact mentioned in most reviews on the subject. Dixon and Lerner (1988) added the psychoanalytical model, the dialectical model and contextualism. They also mentioned the life-span approach. Achenbach (1978) discussed the S–R paradigm, the organismic paradigm, the psychodynamic paradigm and the ethological paradigm, whereas Widdershoven (1994) described the mechanistic, the organismic and the narrative model as general organizers for developmental world views. In the following I will give a brief description of the characteristics of three of the models mentioned above; *mechanism, organicism* and *contextualism* (see Figure 1, p. 13).

The basic metaphor for the mechanistic model is that of the machine (Pepper, 1942; Reese & Overton, 1970). That is, the organism is viewed as composed of a number of discrete parts that operate in a space and time field (Dixon & Lerner, 1988: Reese & Overton, 1970). Machines can differ in complexity. Nevertheless, according to the mechanistic view, they can all be understood and explained in the same manner; by being broken down into their simplest elements (i.e., employing a reductionist explanatory model). The elements that are considered as the most basic, are the chemical and physical processes originally identified in the natural sciences, which, in turn, all function according to a small set of natural laws. According to this model, human behaviour does not function any differently from, for instance, the movements of the planets. Hence, if we understood these fundamental laws we could also explain and predict human behaviour fully. Subsequently, human behaviour can be explained and understood by studying any species since they are all subject to the same physical-chemical laws and only differ in their level of complexity (Kausler, 1991).

In terms of a passive – active continuum, the mechanistic model views the organism as reactive (Reese & Overton, 1970). Man is immanently at rest, and activity is the result of external forces. Thus, change in the organism is not a result of change in the structure of the organism itself. Human development is further viewed as a matter of accumulated experiences (Kausler,1991). A person is the product of her/his environmental experiences, and that which differentiates an older individual from a younger person is the extent, not the quality, of their behavioural repertoires. Thus, change in the mechanistic model is viewed as additional and continuous. The explanatory models are reductionist and deductive-nomological.



PHILOSOPHICAL MODELS OF DEVELOPMENT

KEY ASPECTS:	MECHANISM	ORGANICISM	CONTEXTUALISM
Metaphor:	Machine	Organism	Historical event
Role of the individual:	Passive	Active, interactive	Dynamic, interactive
Explanation of behaviour:	Reductionist	Antireductionist	Antireductionist
View of development:	Continuous	Discontinuous	Dispersive

ADOLESCENCE

DEFINITION:	FOCUS:
Social category	Group
Life stage	Individual

IDENTITY

THEORY:
Crisis (Erikson)
Exploration - Commitment (Marcia)
Processes of exploration (e.g., Grotevant)

CONSTRUCT:
Function
Content
Result
Process

Figure 1. Theoretical perspectives in terms of MODELS OF DEVELOPMENT, ADOLESCENCE, and IDENTITY. The framed areas within each perspective indicate the position and use in this thesis.

The general assumption of the organismic model is that processes of psychological development are similar to the processes of organic development (Achenbach, 1978). That is, psychological structures develop similarly to the structures of the body system. In the organismic model, psychological development is seen as goal-directed and teleological in character and the organism is considered active, constructing a passive environment (Dixon & Lerner, 1988). Further, according to the model, development is qualitative, unidirectional and

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irreversible. That is, a qualitative, rather than a quantitative change occurs when the organism moves from a lower to a higher level of organization. In addition, this movement occurs in a hierarchic and invariant sequence; what has developed cannot "undevelop". As a consequence, a complex phenomenon cannot be explained by reducing it to simpler ones. This is also the essence of the epigenetic principle; each level or stage is not just passed through and left behind. Instead it contributes to the following stage so that something new emerges at each new stage of development (Hall & Lindzey, 1978). In contrast to the additive thinking in the mechanistic model, the organismic model stipulates a multiplicative relationship between the different components; the whole is always considered to be more than the sum of its parts. In addition, explanations in the organismic model are functional rather than purposive as in the mechanistic model (Widdershoven, 1994). That is, walking is not considered a result of the organism developing legs. Instead, the emergence of legs develops in order to enable walking. Functional explanations, as opposed to deductive-nomological explanations, in a general sense, lack the potential for full predictability. That is, a goal can be reached in different ways, walking does not necessarily mean that the organism needs two legs. This is an important difference between the mechanistic and the organismic world views in terms of interpretations of empirical results. A study originating from an organismic approach will never attempt to predict development with the same certainty as the mechanistic model may do.

The contextual model is the most recent of the three models that are presently described. Here the individual and the environment are considered mutually influential and constantly involved in dynamic interaction with each other (Dixon & Lerner, 1988). This model emphasizes man's intentional and purposive nature but also acknowledges the impact of external conditions and processes; an act has no meaning without a context but neither has any context meaning without an act (Cavanaugh, 1990). In contrast to the two models above, there is no active – passive tension between organism and context, instead both are considered active. Here, it is important to notice that the context can either promote or hinder development and growth. Contextualism accepts the possibility of chance occurrences and thus rejects the search for universal laws which is characteristic of both mechanism and organicism. Development is seen as dispersive in the sense that there is no single ideal outcome as is the case in organicism. Hence, individual differences are considered a rule and not an exception. Contextualism further views development as both quantitative and qualitative (Pepper, 1942).

The contextual model has received a lot of interest within the field of developmental psychology since the 70's. It has a lot in common with the emerging approach labelled developmental science (linking developmental research within the social, psychological and biobehavioural disciplines to each other; see Cairns, Elder and Costello, 1996). Embeddedness and dynamic interaction (Lerner, 1986) are concepts used by both. That is, development is considered to occur concurrently at multiple levels of analysis (biological, psychological, societal, cultural, ecological etc.) which are all interrelated. Thus, the focus of analysis within developmental contextualism is the relation itself (i.e., the interlevel linkage), not the single components or elements of each level (Lerner, 1996). This gives rise to one of the main problems of the contextual model; that of complexity. If everything is related to everything, how does one conduct a study at all? According to the spokesmen of contextualism, the issue at stake is to single out the more important interrelationships from the less important ones. Just because all objects have a gravitational relationship with each other, we do not have to adjust our bodies everytime someone in the room moves (Lewontin, 1981). Some interrelationships can be ignored in the empirical situation although their existence is acknowledged.

Developmental Models – a Joint Discussion

Although differing in a number of ways as described above, most models of (human) development have a common intellectual heritage in 19th century evolutionary thinking (Dixon & Lerner, 1988; Sameroff, 1975). In contrast to former, absolute and ahistorical models, this developmental approach argues that the present form of an organism has developed from earlier forms. In addition, the organism is also likely to continue to develop into future forms. Implicit in theories based on evolutionary assumptions is the idea that development always moves from the primitive to the civilized and from the simple to the complex. Also, by using adulthood as the fixed standard, childhood and youth become interpreted comparatively instead of intrinsically (Dewey, 1916/1944). This notion of implicit progressivism where early development is largely defined by a lack of abilities can of course be criticized. Morss (1996) argues that a critical distance to developmental psychology and its explanatory models (as describing reality in a naturalistic manner) has to be established. One way is to treat developmentalism as discourse, a system of meanings that is located in history and also reproducing power relations (Parker, 1992). That is, developmental theories have been produced at certain times, for certain reasons and perhaps in the interest of certain groups. Consequently, when we study development, we also have to establish who is telling a story about whom. Also Noam (1996) has addressed the issue of progressivism. He points out that most forward development also includes a mirror movement. This means that the individual gives up, forgets or unlearns former ways of being in the world at the same time as new capacities are gained. By focusing on the developmental capacities that are involved at each stage (instead of the lack of capacity) we may be able to better understand what issues the growing individual is trying to work out. Further, complex developmental forms of understanding reality does not inevitably lead to better mental health. In fact, delay in development can sometimes have a protective function rather than being a deficiency (Noam, 1996). Thus, the difference between adulthood and childhood, is not the difference between development vs. no development. Instead, the difference is between the mode of development appropriate to the different conditions (Dewey, 1916/1944).

All in all, the basic critique of developmentalism focuses mainly on the elitism that many theories implicitly give voice to. My own position here, is that theories describing development as a movement on a continuum of growing complexity are useful. The problem arises when complexity receives the implicit connotation of being unquestionably good and desirable. Instead, the core of healthy growth and development can be said to recide in an age – stage synchrony. That is, if a young individual functions on a higher level of complexity than what is usually found, this should not necessarily be valued as something to strive for. Rather, the relationship between the chronological age of the individual (and the life tasks that follow with this age) and her/his psychological functioning needs to be in harmony (Noam, 1996).

In the present thesis an organismic/contextual model forms the basic assumptions of how development is organized and what influences it. In conclusion, development is viewed as a process where basic innate patterns receive their shape in the interaction between individual and context.

I have now outlined some metatheoretical considerations on the subject of human development. The next research level constitutes the choice of an appropriate theory that provides explanations for specific phenomena and can translate into investigative opportunities (Winegar, 1997). However, prior to describing my theoretical foundations, I would like the reader to become acquainted with the developmental period that is under focus in this work.

Adolescence

"And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts"
(H.W. Longfellow, 1858)

The word "adolescence" originates from the Latin *adolescere,* which means to grow up, to mature. In contemporary literature it is mainly used in relation to psychological development in contrast to the term *puberty,* which refers to anatomical and physiological changes (Muuss, 1988). Hence, there is a temporal relationship between these two terms; puberty occurs first and adolescence involves the psychological adjustment to these changes (Blos, 1962). To determine the chronological age for this stage is difficult, each individual follows her/his own individual developmental path. Thus, to cover the whole stage, the period between 11 – 25 should be taken into account. In this thesis focus is on the period of 16 – 20 years, here labelled *late adolescence* (cf., Blos, 1962).

The first authors to acknowledge adolescence as a separate phase of life were Plato (trans. 1921) and Aristotle (trans. 1941). Both viewed adolescence through a developmental perspective, and described the period as turbulent and impressionable. They also suggested that young people should be sheltered from the demands of society and helped to gain self-control and maturity by means of schooling (Garrod, Smulyan, Powers, & Kilkenny, 1995). Hence, the ideas of "Sturm und Drang", and the need for a moratorium (i.e., a time for undisturbed reflection), both still used today, are notions about adolescence that were rooted already in the Antique era. During the Middle Ages, the view was less developmental; children and adolescents were instead described as miniature adults (Muuss, 1988). Thus, development was considered additive rather than multiplicative, in line with the mechanistic model of human development described previously. Identity was primarily defined by external factors such as social rank and kinship network (Kroger, 1996a). This view prevailed until Rosseau in his work *Emile* (1762/1962), reintroduced the thought of adolescence as qualitatively different from both childhood and adulthood. Evolutionary theories of human development extended these thoughts during the nineteenth century and G. Stanley Hall, heavily influenced by Darwin, wrote the first modern book on the subject, a two-volume work entitled *Adolescence,* published in 1904. In *Adolescence* Hall expanded Haeckel's theory of recapitulation (Dixon

& Lerner, 1988), which suggests that individuals develop through stages that parallel those of the human civilization. Hall also considered development as largely innate although sometimes influenced by society, thus representing an organismic model of human development. In addition, he strongly emphasized the chaotic and confused character of the adolescent stage. Hall was one of the major influential writers on human development at the time, and his theories had great impact on the study of adolescence by his contemporary scholars. During the course of time these ideas have become both modified and challenged by others. Two different branches can be traced from his writings. The first is the sociological approach, where culture and society were suggested to determine adolescent development (cf. Mead, 1934). The second is the psychoanalytical approach (cf. Anna Freud, 1946; Blos 1962) which for some time continued to focus on the impact of biological factors on the individual's psyche. That is, adolescence was considered as by and large a psychosexual, endogenous process and (in line with Hall) also largely characterized by "Sturm und Drang".

Today research on adolescence can be viewed as an intersection between several different scientific disciplines; sociology, history, anthropology, human biology, psychology and maybe even economy. Consequently, it contains a vast number of issues, methods and theories. However, two major approaches can be distinguished; first, the view of adolescence as a *social category* and, second, as a *phase in the individual's life cycle*. From the sociological perspective, adolescence is often defined as the period between certain social markers, for instance, entering or leaving certain levels of the educational system, going to work, getting married etc. (Mitterauer, 1988). Adolescents then are looked upon as a social group amongst other groups. Research within this approach frequently focuses on issues such as youth cultures, gender aspects and the relation between adolescents and social institutions (e.g., Fornäs, Lindberg, & Sernhede, 1991; Willis, 1977; Ziehe, 1989). The life cycle perspective, in contrast, views adolescence as a developmental process that every growing individual passes through. Terms like self, identity, autonomy, separation, and individuation belong to this approach, which also focuses more on the individual than the sociological perspective described above. In the present thesis adolescence is solely discussed from the life cycle perspective. Here adolescence is often described as a transitional phase, a link between childhood and adulthood. The main developmental task is to form an identity, which in turn, helps the individual to find a place in society, to integrate her/himself into the adult world. A number of issues have to be addressed by the young person (consciously or unconsciously); a reworking of parental relationships, questions that have to do with sexual identity and romantic relationships, educational and vocational choices, and questions related to different beliefs and value systems (religious, philosophical and political). Some of these issues will be addressed in the present work.

Identity: Theory and Research

maggie and millie and molly and may
went down to the beach to play (one day)
and maggie discovered a shell that sang
so sweetly she couldn't remember her troubles, and
milly befriended a stranded star
whose rays five languid fingers were,
and molly was chased by a horrible thing
which raced sideways while blowing bubbles; and
may came home with a smooth round stone
as small as a world and as large as alone.
for whatever we lose (like a you or a me)
it's always ourselves we find in the sea.
(e.e. cummings, 1989)

Most of today's identity theory and research is based, or in some way related to Erikson's (1959, 1968) writings on this subject. This is in fact the only major, comprehensive theory addressing the topics of both adolescence and identity from a developmental perspective. The following section will therefore start with a general discussion of identity from the perspective of Erikson and of those who have followed and developed his ideas. As noted previously, identity is an elusive and hard-to-define concept. In order to bring some clarity to the subject, the discussion will then be structured around four aspects; function, content, result, and process. That is, why do we need an identity, what does it include, what "kind" of identities are there and, how does identity come to be?

Identity – a General Discussion

Erikson's (1959) epigenetic, psychosocial theory of human development has been very influential within developmental psychology, but has perhaps had its largest impact on theories concerning adolescent identity formation. For a long time Erikson placed a particular emphasis on adolescence in his writings, a time he considered especially important because of its transitional qualities and future impact on the individual's life. Although closely tied to psychoanalytical theory, the identity concept has never been incorporated into the classic triad of the id, ego and superego. Neither has it been integrated into object relations theory, nor theories of self (Ramström, 1991). Erikson explained this by pointing to the fact that traditional psychoanalysis does not have a terminology that can be used in order to conceptualize the environment (Kroger, 1996a), one of the key aspects of his own writings. However, by now the identity construct is considered one of the most robust within developmental psychology (Archer, 1993), and this despite the problems of catching its meaning. In addition, it is an indispensable component in discussions of adolescence and adolescent development.

What then is identity and how does it develop? Haslett (1993), suggests that identity is a concept we use "to describe and attempt to understand one aspect of the central mystery of existence" (p. 253-254). Needless to say, finding a definition to that will not be an easy task! If we start by tracing its semantic roots, the word identity stems from the Latin *idem,* meaning "the same". A consultation of the Oxford Dictionary (1996) presents a number of definitions; "the quality or condition of being a specified person or thing", "individuality, personality" and "absolute sameness". In the mathematical context the following definition is given; "an element, in a set, left unchanged by any operation on it". This encapsulates one of identity's many paradoxes and ambiguities; the fact that change and sameness exist within the same concept. Another ambiguity concerns the individual's own sense of herself vs. that by which others come to know her (Bosma, et al., 1994). That is, identity simultaneously contains self-definitions and the definitions made by others. Further, identity always encompasses time; when we think of our own identity as well as others', we simultaneously think of something that has been, is at the time and will be in the future. Identity then, cannot exist in a temporal vacuum, just as it cannot exist in a relational vacuum; it develops over time and in experience with others. In addition, Erikson (1959) emphasized that identity development takes part inside the individual but also within her/his culture, that is, *both individual and culture are shaped in the process.* In his search for basic laws of human behaviour, Erikson pictured development as proceeding through a number of stages, progressing towards an end-state of the organism (Erikson, 1985). The theory thus originates from an organismic world view but differs, like psychoanalysis in general, from the original model in the sense that regression is considered possible. Erikson's main contribution was to emphasize the effect of contextual forces on development, which also posits him close to the contextual world view described above. The cause of movement from one stage to the next is, according to the theory, determined by two factors; a changing biology in combination with the age-related demands that society makes on the individual (J. Kroger, personal communication, November, 1998). The first four stages occur during infancy and childhood, the fifth during adolescence and the last three during the adult years including old age. Each stage, according to Erikson, involves a psychosocial task, a crisis, that has to be resolved before entering the next stage. The resolution of a crisis involves finding a place on the continuum between the two poles of each stage (e.g., trust vs. mistrust, identity vs. identity diffusion). Thus, development progresses through a dialectical process of tension and resolution. Every time the individual resolves such a crisis (rather than avoids it), a specific value, or virtue, is built into her/his identity (e.g., hope and fidelity). Identity, in Erikson's view, is always about values and subsequently, an identity crisis is always simultaneously a crisis of values. Thus, to be occupied with issues concerning individual identity is simultaneously a way of participating in society's ongoing discussion of culture and values (Hvarfner, 1988; see also Baumeister & Muraven, 1996). If we examine Erikson's notion of identity further, two more aspects can be found. First, he talks of the personal identity which mainly refers to the feeling of self-sameness and continuity in time, combined with the fact that others also recognize this sameness and continuity. Second, the ego identity, which is closely connected to the cultural setting of the individual. Also other writers in the psychoanalytical and psychodynamic tradition have conceptualized identity in terms of two tracks or themes (Ramström, 1991). Pederson (1978) discusses an existential and a social energy within our identity, and Lichtenstein (1977) describes identity as the balance between separateness and relatedness (cf., Adams & Marshall, 1996), that is, between total isolation and the return to a symbiotic state originally experienced with the primary care giver. Ramström (1991) develops this line of thought by dividing identity in two main aspects; individuation/separation vs. integration. Individuation and separation refer to the same type of questions as Erikson's personal identity and are suggested to dominate the early part of development. The task then, is to separate and define oneself in relation to others and also to be able to maintain this definition in space and over time. Integration (divided into two part aspects; the social and the existential) conversely, is specific to late and post adolescence. Inner questions now concern social function, relations to others, ideological questions, norms and value systems.

To summarize, identity is conceptualized by many authors as "the balance between self and others" (Kroger, 1996a), containing a strong mutuality between the individual and his or her world. Finally, and further adding to a holistic view, Erikson defines identity in an interdisciplinary way (Kroger, 1996a). He speaks of three processes of organization that always must be taken into consideration when human existence is discussed; *soma, psyche* and *ethos* (Erikson, 1985). That is, biological endowment, personal organization of experiences and cultural environment all contribute to the individual's unique sense of self.

The Function of Identity – a Question of Psychological Well-Being?

Why do people need an identity? Erikson suggested that a well integrated identity is experienced "as a sense of psychosocial well-being. Its most obvious concomitants are a feeling of being at home in one's body, a sense of 'knowing where one is going', and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count." (Erikson, 1959, p. 127-128). Marcia (1993) argues that having a mature external relational world depends on a firmly established internal relational world. That is, having a firm sense of self is the root of good relations with others. Holland and Skinner (1997), inspired by the cultural-historical school of psychology, speaks of identity as a self-understanding (which is always attached to an emotion) that gives an ongoing point of view, situating the individual in a place that provides a view of herself and the world where (s)he lives. Grotevant (1993), in turn, discusses identity through the narrative approach. Here, identity is viewed as a life history which provides the individual with coherence and a purpose to life. Staying within the narrative approach, McAdams (1987) argues that by formulating and presenting to others a dynamic and internalized story about oneself, the individual's past, present and future become integrated. Simultaneously, the story situates the individual in a social niche and in historical time, again, expressed as providing a sense of unity and purpose to life. This, in turn, also allows for the ability to adapt to a changing context. Thus, although narrative approaches seldom address developmental issues, but rather focus on the story itself (McAdams, 1987), the view on identity is located close to the Eriksonian view. In all, the function of identity described by a number of authors seems to be *to anchor the individual in a personally meaningful psychosocial niche.* This is, in turn, linked to psychological well-being and healthy relationships with others. In fact, Lichtenstein (1977) argues that the need for a sense of identity is one of the strongest forces within all human beings. Well then, the question has to be raised; is this a universal truth or merely a Twentieth Century construction and belonging only to Western societies? It is beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt to answer that question. Erikson's model of life-span development does indeed assume a universal sequence of psychosocial tasks that the individual has to cope with. However, there are no assumptions that all people experience these in a similar manner, nor that they change in the same way as a result (Flavell, 1970).

Content and Result – Stepping Closer to the Empirical Reality

According to Kroger (1993a, for a review), three general approaches in identity research have emerged from Erikson's theory. The first has focused on the adolescent stage in relation to the other seven stages, emphasizing Erikson's own notion that the resolution to each stage is a result of former resolutions and simultaneously helps determine the future. The main interest of the second approach is related to the resolution of the conflict itself, identity vs. identity diffusion. This approach has described identity mainly in quantitative terms and often related these measures to other personality variables. The third approach, describes identity in more qualitative dimensions and the most dominating line of research here is represented by Marcia's identity status paradigm (1966). Marcia's methodological and empirical contributions to the study of identity formation are widely recognized and numerous research studies by him and his followers have expanded and elaborated Erikson's theory. Hence, this third approach deserves to be outlined more thoroughly than the two previous ones.

The main difference between the identity status paradigm and Erikson's original theory, is the shift from the use of crisis as a central concept, towards the terms exploration and commitment. The content of identity can be viewed in terms of the domains originally discussed by Erikson; ideology, occupation and sexuality (Grotevant, 1993). Erikson described identity formation as the exploration of different alternatives and the making of choices, commitments, in relation to these domains. Thus, identity formation can be viewed in terms of finding oneself in relation to religious/political/philosophical values, in terms of vocational/occupational choices and, finally, in terms of sexual/romantic relationships. Assessing identity (i.e., the result dimension) would then be a matter of assessing the individual's process of exploration and commitments in these domains. These assessments constitute the key issue within the identity status paradigm. Thus, Marcia (1966) operationalized Erikson's fifth develop mental stage into four statuses of identity resolution; identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium and identity achievement. Each identity status, is a mode of response on the part of the adolescent to the intrapsychic and social demands of identity formation, in terms of personal crisis and present degree of decision-making (Bourne, 1978). This is measured (by means of a semi-structured interview, or a more recently developed paper-and-pen test; Adams, Bennion, & Huh, 1989) as a combination of high vs. low exploration and commitment in relation to the formation of values within each of the previously mentioned domains. The aim of the interview is to establish whether or not the adolescent has formed commitments and if so, whether this was done through exploration of different alternatives or simply "inherited" by (significant) others. To date over three hundred studies have employed the identity status paradigm (Kroger, 1993a). Each status has been associated with certain characteristics (for reviews on this subject see Bourne, 1978; Kroger, 1993a) where achievers generally score higher than the other three statuses on a number of positively valued issues such as psychological well-being, cognitive complexity, academic motivation, and level of intimacy with friends. The current focuses of identity status research include issues such as ethnicity (Phinney, 1989), the role of relationships (Archer, 1993), adoption (Grotevant, 1994) and the role of historical and social context (Côte, 1993; Kroger, 1993b; Roker & Banks, 1993). Also, new types within the four statuses have been proposed (Archer & Waterman, 1990) together with new measures to assess resolutions of other stage tasks within the Eriksonian model (Bradley & Marcia, 1993; Hearn & Marcia, 1994; McAdams, Diamond, de St Aubin, & Mansfield; 1997). Marcia recently outlined four identity statuses within the seventh and eighth stages of development respectively, corresponding to, but different from the four statuses of adolescence (Marcia & Kroger, 1999).

The Marcia paradigm has been criticized for diverging too much from the original theory, being too empirical, atheoretical, and for using some of Erikson's terms inappropriately (Côte & Levine, 1988). However, the main criticism refers to the assumption that a continuum underlies the identity statuses, stretching from a low to a high level of identity development. Two major lines of critique have been raised here. First, a radical rejection of the idea of the continuum altogether (Waterman, 1988), leaving the theory to be only descriptive where the four statuses constitute a typology of different approaches to identity formation. Second, a modification of the idea of a continuum in the sense that different developmental paths through the statuses are acknowledged along with the possibility of regression (Archer, 1989; Kroger, 1996b). Empirical findings support this second assumption (Meeus, 1996; Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, in press). There is a systematic increase from low statuses (i.e., diffusion and foreclosures) to high statuses (i.e., moratoriums and achievements). However, achievement is not the end point of development for everyone. According to Meeus et al. (in press) foreclosure must be considered as another possibility and some individuals may also stay diffused (Kroger, personal communication, November, 1998).

In sum, then, both content and result of identity development has been addressed extensively in the identity status paradigm. This paradigm also addresses questions of process, an issue which will be further discussed in the coming section.

Identity as a Process – From Introjections and Identifications to Adolescent Identity Formation

Identity development does not start with adolescence, neither does it end when the individual enters young adulthood. It is a lifelong process beginning in the first meeting between the new-born infant and the mothering adult (Erikson, 1959). The intrapsychic mechanisms involved in the process of identity solutions proceed from introjection and projection during infancy, to identification during childhood and finally to identity formation during adolescence (please note the difference between identity development and identity formation, where the former refers to a lifelong process and the latter to the process specifically related to the adolescent period). Thus, Erikson views identity formation as the synthesis of all childhood identifications (in turn resting on introjections) in the light of an anticipated future. The end result is described as something more than just the sum of its parts: "The final identity, then, as fixed at the end of adolescence is superordinated to any single identification with individuals of the past: it includes all significant identifications, but it also alters them in order to make a unique and a reasonable coherent whole of them" (Erikson, 1959, p.121). Related to each intrapsychic mechanism, Erikson points to the interpersonal counterpart needed in the process; the mothering adult in the process of introjection – projection, the family for providing possibilities for identifications (conscious and unconscious) and finally, society for identity formation. There is also a strong emphasis on the responsibility of society here; a good-enough-environment (Blos, 1962) is as necessary during adolescence as good-enough-mothering

(Winnicot, 1965) during the early stages of development. The adolescent needs to be responded to, given a function and become recognized as a maturing person in her/his own right, in order for the process of identity formation to proceed in an optimal manner.

In order to reach a mature identity Erikson stipulates that the individual needs to go through a crisis. Identity, identity crisis and identity diffusion are undoubtedly the most familiar of Erikson's concepts. However, the notion of a developmentally unavoidable time of crises has caused his theory to receive much criticism (incidentally, Erikson has also been criticized for what has been thought of as an overly optimistic view of humans and human development). Much of the critique here may originate in different definitions of the actual word crisis. All eight stages in Erikson's epigenetic theory involves a crisis where the individual arrives at a synthesis of the two poles (e.g., trust – mistrust, autonomy – shame, doubt etc.) in accordance with the outcomes of earlier stages and current life situation. However, this does not automatically imply that each stage elicits behaviour characterized by chaos and confusion. Erikson specifically points out that adolescence is not an affliction but a normative crisis (Erikson, 1959). That is, a crisis here, is not a threatening catastrophe, it is a necessary turning point where development must go in any one of two directions, either towards further maturation or alienation (Hvarfner, 1988). Hence, without anxiety, conflict and crisis there would be no human strength. However, the turmoil theory of adolescent development (initially grown out of Hall's (1904) work, but also resulting from the fact that most research was originally based on observations of clinical samples), has gradually shifted towards an emphasis on continuity and change *within* relational systems, in contrast to the previous focus on disintegration and rebellion (Garrod et al., 1995). In addition, contemporary research accepts a larger variation within the definitions of normality than what is found in previous research.

With the identity status paradigm, Marcia (1966) took the first step away from the crisis concept by focusing more on adolescents' explorations and commitments in the different domains discussed above. This path has been further pursued by Grotevant (1986; 1987) who argues that identity research now should proceed towards a focus on processes of exploration in order to understand identity formation better. Grotevant (1987) also criticizes the identity status work for having been too descriptive and too focused on correlates to the four statuses. In order to study the process of identity exploration more directly he presents a process model which is developmental, contextual and life-span in scope. Identity exploration is (drawing from Jordaans' (1963) writings on career exploration), defined as "problem-solving behaviour aimed at eliciting information about oneself or one's environment in order to make a decision about an important life choice" (Grotevant, 1987, p. 204). The model includes four components, all necessary to address in order to study and understand identity exploration. First, individual characteristics such as personality and cognitive ability. Second, the context where development takes place, culture, school, family etc. Third, identity domains (e.g., sexuality, career choice, development of religious/political values), and finally the interdependencies among developments in these different identity domains. In sum, the model sees identity formation as a function of individual characteristics, what the context provides and allows, the specific domain involved and the relationship between developmental processes that takes place simultaneously in different domains.

In addition to Grotevant's attempt to get closer to the underlying processes of identity formation, Kroger (1993a) also points to the fact that research has focused mainly on outcomes in terms of defined stages (or, statuses) and not sufficiently on the nature of structural transition in the identity formation process. What are the mechanisms involved when a person moves from one stage to another, she asks, and continues with suggesting two factors; conflict and readiness to experience conflict. Marcia (1993) adds that a necessary component for facilitating change may also be an environment which is, if not supportive, so at least not rejecting. In Kroger's and Marcia's discussions we find both the individual characteristics and the contextual component from the previously described model of Grotevant. That is, identity formation can never be discussed in terms of the individual solely, contextual factors must also be considered. However, these are often difficult to dimensionalize and have subsequently been largely ignored in the research literature (Grotevant, 1987). Rakoff (1981) adds to the critique here by suggesting that there has been a corruption of Erikson's original, strong, societal emphasis not only in research but also in clinical settings. Adolescents are in general described in terms of personal adaptation (or non-adaptation), alienated from the family, which in turn is discussed in a similar "autonomous bubble" alienated from society. In addition, Ramström (1991) suggests that by studying the integrative aspects of identity it would be possible to gain a better understanding of the meeting of the inside and outside world in identity formation. It is necessary, he continues, to reflect over society's ways of supporting young people as they are travelling from adolescence into adulthood. What is the climate of the culture, does it signal to the adolescent that the aim of adolescence is in fact to become an adult? Does it then provide the necessary components in this process; contacts with adults to identify with, opportunities to test "adult roles" and develop one's social skills, arenas for ideological dialogues etc.? These are all questions that need to be considered when we attempt to understand the intrapsychic processes and outcomes of the growing individual.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE THESIS

In order to clarify the theoretical assumptions I have used in this work, I now find it is time to make a short summary of the three previous sections; development, adolescence and identity theory. The reader is also directed to Figure 1 (see p. 13), which may serve as an illustration to my line of thought.

As we have seen there are a number of different ways of conceptualizing development, although most authors seem to agree that development does entail some type of organized change. Whether this organized change is continuous or discontinuous and, if it is caused by nature or nurture are issues of debate. In Figure 1 (p. 13) (drawing from Kausler, 1991), the three most frequently discussed developmental models are presented; the mechanistic model, the organismic, and the contextual model. These three models differ on a number of points; they can be described with different metaphors, they employ different explanatory models, they have different views on the role of the individual, and they discuss the actual nature of development in different manners. However, some basic similarities exist between the organismic and the contextual models. They both explain behaviour in an anti-reductionist manner and they both talk of interaction between the individual and the environment, this I will return to later.

Adolescence can basically be discussed in the sense of being a social category or a phase in the individual's life cycle (where the issue at stake is to move from the world of children into to the world of adults). The implication of using the first definition is that focus is placed mainly on young people as a group in relation to other groups (and institutions) in society. Using the second definition instead leads to a more individual approach where issues like individuation, autonomy – relatedness, self, and identity become primary objects of interest. Whether adolescence has existed throughout time and history or not is a question of debate. The answer can partly be found in the choice of definition that is used. Adolescence, in the sense of a social category, is a relatively new occurrence. Adolescence as a transitional life stage, however, can be viewed from a more universal and somewhat less context-bound perspective.

Identity development within the Eriksonian paradigm is viewed as an interactional process between the individual and his/her environment. The core of identity is considered to originate in the dialogue between the mother (or the mothering adult) and her child. Later, the individual and her/his socio-cultural context act and interact in a reciprocal way, leading to development of both the individual's identity and the identity of her/his culture. This process occurs throughout life but is highlighted during adolescence. Here, questions of separation are suggested to predominate the early parts and questions of integration the latter parts. In addition, biological endowment, personal organization of experiences, and cultural environment all contribute to the individual's unique sense of self. Further, identity theory and research has moved from a primary focus on the identity crisis, to exploration and commitments and to its current interest in processes of exploration.

Considering theory in relation to developmental models, the Eriksonian paradigm has to be placed partly in the organismic and partly in the contextual model. It views development in an anti-reductionist way, as discontinuous (and teleological) rather than dispersive, but at all instances emphasizes the role of the individual as interactive with her/his environment. Thus, as marked in Figure 1 (p. 13), the developmental model this work is built on is a combination of the organismic and the contextual view. The same figure also indicates my use of the term adolescence; a transitional life stage as opposed to the social category approach. In relation to the three "waves" of identity theory, my way of thinking has been more influenced by the theories following from Marcia's status theory than the status theory itself. However, Marcia's ideas constitute one of the basic cornerstones in contemporary identity theory. Not taking them into consideration would be to build one's house upon sand. Hence, all three waves have been marked in Figure 1 (p. 13) as theoretically important for the present thesis.

In conclusion, in my aim to explore the subject of identity development during late adolescence, I have employed an organismic/contextual model of development, anchored my thinking theoretically in the Eriksonian paradigm which (automatically) defines adolescence as a life stage.

Finally, the discussion on the identity construct was structured around four issues; function, content, result and process, my position here will be further discussed in the next section.

EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVES

This second overview is aimed as an introduction to the three domains that have been under study in the empirical work of the present thesis. Theories and previous research in relation to adolescents' self-concept, existential questions and adult contacts will be presented and discussed. Following this (and prior to a presentation of some philosophical considerations in the choice of methods), I will present the purpose of the thesis in terms of an overall research interest, three specific questions, and a number of empirical questions and assumptions.

The relationship between the theoretical concept of identity and the empirical concepts (i.e., self-concept, existential questions and adult contacts) is illustrated in Figure 2. This figure also shows the focus of each study.

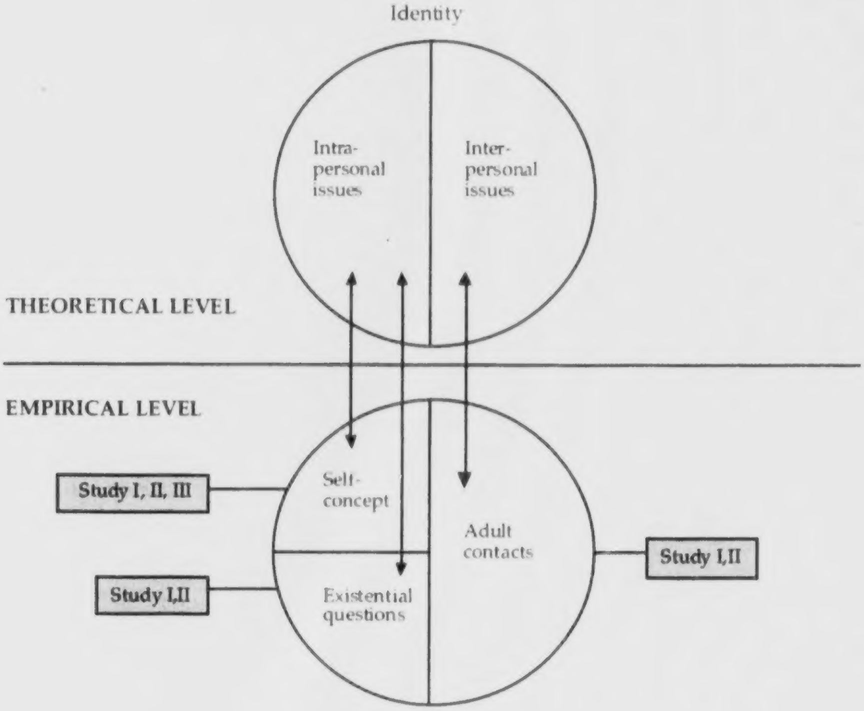
Identity
Intra-personal issues
Inter-personal issues
THEORETICAL LEVEL
EMPIRICAL LEVEL
Study I, II, III
Self-concept
Study I,II
Existential questions
Adult contacts
Study I,II

Figure 2. Overall illustration of the theoretical - empirical relationships between IDENTITY vs. SELF-CONCEPT, EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS and ADULT CONTACTS. The figure also indicates the empirical domains of each study.

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Self-Concept

Freedom and constraint are two aspects of the same necessity,
which is to be what one is and no other.
(A. de Saint Exupéry, 1948)

The term self-concept has as many definitions and meanings as the term identity. In fact, both are treated "like people often treat money; highly important but spent carelessly" (Graafsma & Bosma, 1994, p. 181). Sometimes they are used simultaneously, sometimes one is subordinated the other. As with many other psychological terms and constructs it is impossible to arrive at a "once-and-for-all" definition. What has to be remembered is, that what we are trying to grasp and describe, are not physical and concrete entities but abstract constructions and processes, conceptualized and understood in different ways by different authors. Also, new terms are recurrently introduced, in order to escape from previous theory laden implications and meanings. However, in this world of definitional fuzziness, one legitimate claim is that every author defines her/his own use of the terms in a clear and unambiguous manner. Therefore, my aim in this section is to make a brief presentation of what the term self-concept may include, my own use of it and how I make the distinction between self-concept and identity.

Any discussion of the term self-concept must start with a discussion of how the term *self* can be understood. Graafsma & Bosma (1994), discuss the self in three different senses; *the ontological, the functional* and *the phenomenal* sense. The first refers to the essence of a person often described as "the true self", "the inner core" or "the very Me". Opinions differ whether this ontological self actually exists or not (where the humanistic psychology is in favour, but Sartrean existentialism is not). In the second sense self is described as an agent, a motivational force that underlies the individual's different activities. Here it is difficult to differentiate the self from what the (neo)psychoanalytical tradition refers to as ego. Finally, self in a phenomenal sense is understood as the individual's sense of self, including self-awareness, self-perceptions and images of one's own personality. Both the ontological and functional sense of the self can be considered self structures that can be objectively discussed (for instance, in terms of whether they exist or not). The phenomenal sense of self is situated closer to the psychoanalytical view. Here the self is described not as a structure, but as a mental content existing in the ego (Hartman, 1939). It is referred to as the person's feelings and thoughts about her/himself and considered a product of the ego.

According to Harter (1983) theories of understanding the self can be organized around two major themes; self as *subject vs. object* (Cooley, 1902; James, 1890/1963; Mead, 1934) and self in *relation to others* (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). These two themes do not stand in opposition to each other, they simply address different issues in the understanding of the self. In relation to the empirical context Harter observes that the self is often used not as a legitimate construct in itself, but rather as a prefix to an unseemingly endless amount of constructs; self-image, self-experience, self-esteem, self-recognition, self-schemata, self-awareness, self-theory, self-control, self-concept, etc. In the literature on self-concept this term often refers to the totality of inferences the individual has made of her/himself (Baumeister, 1997); a loosely connected set of ideas and illusions, which also contains an evaluative aspect usually known as self-esteem. Self-concept is often measured by analysing self-attributions on trait lists but also by free descriptions of the self (Bosma et al., 1994), where different content categories often are distinguished. That is, in terms of "self as subject vs. object" major attention has been given to self as an object of one's own knowledge, whereas self as a subject (i.e., the active observer) has received far less interest (Harter, 1983). In all, several thousands of studies have been published on the subject of self-conceptions (most of them devoted to self-esteem; Corsini & Auerbach, 1998). Typical in the literature in this area is, that a number of distinctions, categories and taxonomies have been suggested and discussed. The opposite is true within the literature on identity where, contrarily, there is a tendency towards treating the term as a single entity.

Finally, in the present thesis I use the terms identity and self-concept as follows (see Figure 2, p. 31). Identity is used as an overarching construct to that of self-concept. Further, in line with my previous definitions, identity has a dual aspect; that of the person's self experience and that of other's recognition of her. In the empirical context my aim is to study the first part of these aspects, that is, the individual's mental representation of herself. Thus, viewing the self as content (i.e., in line with the psychoanalytical tradition) rather than structure, is consistent with my own use of the terms self and self-concept. I have, in the three studies included in this thesis, examined adolescents' descriptions, reflections and evaluations of themselves. Hence, in relation to my empirical work I use the term self-concept but, when I discuss and link my findings to a broader theoretical framework with regard to adolescent development, I use the term identity. That is, my specific research questions (and operationalizations) concern adolescents' self-concept. These questions are, however, derived from identity theory and later also become linked back to that context. Subsequently, the motion of this thesis can be described as spiral, starting in identity theory, moving to self-concept in the empirical works and than proceeding (and hopefully adding) to identity theory again.

In the present work, all three studies examine adolescents' self-concept, although in somewhat different manners. My general interest has been exploratory. How do adolescents perceive themselves, and, is it possible to find any developmental patterns in these perceptions? In Study I, adolescents were asked to rate themselves by means of a personality inventory (Structural Analysis of Social Behaviour, SASB; Benjamin, 1974; 1994) and also to rate how satisfied they felt with themselves. In Study II, an interview study, the participants were asked to describe themselves ("Please tell me who you are"). In Study III, finally, SASB was used again, this time in order to compare the self-concept of 16- and 18- year old adolescents, but also in order to compare the adolescents with a group of adults.

All in all, in this work identity is used as a broad, theoretical concept where self-concept is one part aspect connected to the individual's self-experience. Further, self-concept can be divided into content and structure. Here, the term is solely used in relation to content in the form of adolescents' descriptions, reflections and evaluations of themselves.

Existential Questions – Questions of Life

On Monday when the sun is hot
I wonder to myself a lot
"Now is it true or is it not,
that what is which and which is what?"

On Tuesday when it hails and snows,
the feeling on me grows and grows
that hardly anybody knows
if those are these or these are those

On Wednesday, when the sky is blue,
and I have nothing else to do,
I sometimes wonder if it's true
that who is what and what is who

On Thursday, when it starts to freeze
and hoar-frost twinkles on the trees,
how very readily one sees
that these are whose – but whose are these?

On Friday – (...and here Pooh was interrupted by Kanga and Baby Roo)
(A.A. Milne, 1958).

We are born, we live together with other human beings and we die. These are the fundamental aspects of human existence, shared by everyone regardless of cultural, social or historical context. These are the conditions that everyone has to find her or his own ways to handle, and in these conditions there is an endless amount of issues and questions to be addressed. Leaving childhood and entering the world of adults is one of them. In a sense, "being born, living with others and dying" is also a very succinct epitome of Erikson's theory which, in addition to just being developmental, also points to an ethical and existential dimension of human life (Hvarfner, 1988). In the following I will present my two ways of using the term existential question (used interchangeably with the term questions of life); one empirical/functional and one theoretical/content oriented.

The majority of research within the domain of existential issues, concerns religion in one form or another (Stifos-Hansson & Kallenberg, 1996). However, this is not the case in the present work and, subsequently, I will not dwell on any of the existing theories of religious development (e.g., Fowler, 1981; Goldman, 1964; Stewart, 1967; Tamminen, 1991). Instead, by using Pooh's little poem as an introduction I want to emphasize that my use of the terms existential and existential question, is predominantly broad and *functional,* and to a lesser extent *content* oriented. That is, existential questions in the empirical studies of the present thesis are defined as *a central theme of interest to the individual at the time of inquiry,* and the research question concerns what the principle elements of existential questions during late adolescence consist of. Thus, existential questions may refer to issues such as life and death, good and evil, responsibility and guilt etc. but, they may also concern things in closer proximity to the individual's everyday life. This is in line with Hartman (1986a; 1986b) who defined existential questions as, a) referring to questions about the fundamental conditions of human life and existence at large, and, b) expressions of the individual's need to process her own experiences and of her experiences in relation to the environment. Further, this need is said to originate from the desire to interpret, understand and ultimately find a meaning of and purpose in life. Following from this, an existential question does not have to be dramatic or acute, it is simply something the individual is mentally occupied with and trying to work out an answer or solution to. Thus, an existential question is more a challenge than a problem and it need not be treated or eliminated. Jakobsson (1994) discusses the relation between existential and psychological concerns in psychotherapy and argues that they do overlap. However, psychological problems are more limited than existential ones and need to be eliminated and dissolved, or at least learned to live with. An existential question on the other hand, needs to be resolved in such a way that the answer can be added as another brick in the construction of the individual's understanding of her/himself and the world (s)he lives in. Thus, existential questions and challenges can be considered a part of a meaningful life, and should only be considered as problems when they exceed the individual's capacity and resources to handle them (Stiffos-Hanssen & Kallenberg, 1996). Further, finding answers to existential questions is the process by which a *personal view of life* is built (Hartman, 1986b). Kallenberg (1989) defines this term as a "synthesis of the individual's collected experiences of life", unique to her/him, yet, simultaneously something that (s)he shares with others who belong to the same culture. According to Jeffner (1988), a view of life contains three components. First, general theories about man and the world. Second, a system of values which deals with questions of what is good and evil, right and wrong etc. Finally, what he terms "a basic attitude" which can be seen as a response to the question "How do you feel about life?", in other words, the practical implication of one's world view, the pattern by which one interprets life. In a sense, the discussion on identity and existential issues converges here. Jeffner's (1988) basic attitude can, in fact, be thought of as representing the intersection between existential questions and psychology. In understanding somebody's basic attitude towards life we can also understand something about her personality, her identity. In the reverse, by understanding somebody's identity we can also understand something about her basic attitude and view of life. Thus, the individual's existential questions are intrinsically related to her identity development, her existential questions are in fact also her identity questions. This is also my rationale for choosing adolescents' existential questions as one domain for the study of identity development. That is, by letting the adolescents specify the content themselves I have used existential questions, in the functional sense, as a means of understanding the process of identity development. However, by using the identity model outlined by Ramström (1991) as a theoretical framework, I have also used existential in terms of content. Ramström suggests that two part-aspects of identity dominate late adolescence; the social and the existential. The first refers to the individual's strivings towards integration in the social world, the second to find oneself in relation to different value systems, whether these are political, philosophical or religious. Also here identity touches existential issues and world views. Hartman (1986b) distinguishes between a personal and an established world view, where the last refers to religious, political or philosophical value systems. Further, whereas everyone has a personal world view not everyone is a follower of an established world view. Adding this line of thought to Ramströms identity model, it is possible to think that some people do not develop this part of identity, or, maybe we should instead conceptualize this part of identity on a continuum of "more" or "less" or, "articulated" or "diffuse". In addition, the term existential here becomes closely related to that of "ideology" in Erikson's works, that is, the domains empirically investigated within the Marcia tradition. In fact Marcia's four statuses can well be discussed in terms of "articulated" or "diffuse" value systems.

To summarize, in the present work the term existential question in its content oriented sense has primarily been used as a theoretical foundation from where I have reflected on identity and also formed some of my research questions. Further, in the empirical studies I have used the term in the functional sense, as a way of studying a process, not as a domain where this process is examined. Existential questions were examined in Study I and II. In Study I, adolescents were asked to write a short essay under the heading of "My Questions of Life". These essays were then analysed according to content and the results used to construct a questionnaire. (That is, in the questionnaire the term existential question is used in a content fashion. However, these contents were predefined by the adolescents themselves in the essays.) In Study II, twelve adolescents were asked the open question "What do you find important in your life right now, what do you often find yourself thinking about?" in an interview situation. This situation can be compared to the essay, the subjects were free to decide the content themselves, thus making the use of the term existential question functional also here.

In all, adolescents' existential questions have been used as a complement in order to study intrapersonal aspects of identity development (see Figure 2, p. 31). In terms of function and content, I have used the term existential in a functional way in order to let adolescent's themselves define the content.

Adolescents' Contacts With Adults

Wednesday morning at five o'clock as
the day begins
Silently closing her bedroom door
Leaving the note that she hoped would say more
She goes downstairs to the kitchen
clutching her handkerchief
Quietly turning the backdoor key
Stepping outside she is free
She (We gave her most of our lives)
is leaving (Sacrified most of our lives)
home (We gave her everything money could buy)
She's leaving home, bye bye.
(Lennon & McCartney, 1967)

Research and literature on adolescents and their contacts with the adult world are limited. Adolescents' relationships with adults other than parents is an especially neglected area (Galbo, 1984; Galbo, 1986; Scales & Gibbons, 1996). Focus has mainly been placed on parental relationships and issues of autonomy and (more or less problematic) separations. This may be a result of what Ramström (1991) described as the lopsided interest of the individuation aspect of identity (see also Rakoff, 1978), detrimental to our understanding of integrative processes during the adolescent stage. However, it may also originate in the difficulties of dimensionalizing contextual factors, as noticed by Grotevant (1987). The impact on identity development through the interactions between family members can be difficult enough to study, let alone the impact of relationships outside the family. Thus, interactions between adolescents and teachers, adolescents and sports and community leaders, and even adolescents and older relatives have been left pretty much as flotsam and jetsam upon the water. Hence, a review of the literature on the topic of adolescent adult interactions necessarily begins within the family.

Contemporary research on adolescents' relationships with parents generally emphasizes two aspects. The first aspect is the importance of *maintaining emotional closeness* to the parents, while simultaneously, developing a psychological independence (Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O'Connor, 1984; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Thus, rather than placing autonomy and relatedness as opposite poles on a scale, research is increasingly suggesting that for optimal social development and identity formation, adolescent – parent relationships should incorporate both qualities (Allen & Hauser, 1996). These issues consistently emerge in situations where the adolescent and her/his parents have to handle differences of opinion. Here, a number of authors (Allen et al., 1984; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; 1986; Powers, Hauser, Schwartz, Noam, & Jacobson, 1983; White, Speisman, & Costos, 1983) have found, that being able to share different perspectives in a context of support (i.e., "agreeing on disagreeing") is positively related to ego development.

The second aspect that is generally emphasized is related to the previous one; an increased *symmetry of influence* in the adolescent – parent relation has been claimed to account for substantial parts of individual differences in development during the adolescent period (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). Again, the relationship is considered in need to be transformed, not broken. Adolescents and parents should ideally, move from childhood dependency towards a state where rights and responsibilities are mutually shared. However, some authors (e.g., Allen & Hauser, 1996; Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gillies, Fleming, & Gamble, 1993) argue, that equal to the infant's return to the mother in times of stress, the adolescent also needs someone to come back to and gather strength for further explorations (cf., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Allen & Hauser, 1996; Bowlby, 1969). Thus, one primary function of parents remain during adolescence; to be available as a source of help and comfort, a safe haven to return to when needed (Kenny & Rice, 1995).

As previously shown, contemporary identity theory and research strongly emphasizes the role of exploratory processes as a primary force in identity formation. Further, the ability to explore is considered a function of the quality of family relationships (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). However, Ramström (1991) also claims that *processes of identification* is a central mechanism when internalizing and structuring the integrative parts of identity. This is further supported by results from the work with disturbed adolescents (Aichhorn, 1978). Identifications can occur consciously or unconsciously, in primitive and childish manners, or in more mature and selective ways (Schaefer, 1968). Further, identifications can be part of separating from or moving closer to somebody but, in all circumstances, in order to identify one needs someone to identify with. Parents are important here, but, during adolescence there is also a growing need for other adults. In addition, this need often stands in relation to the amount of conflict the adolescent experiences with her/his parents. Hence, without "generative adults" (cf. Erikson's seventh normative crisis; 1959) outside the family system to identify with, identity formation can be severely impaired (Ramström, 1991). Further, recent reports claim that positive adult relationships are related to psychological well-being, which in turn is strongly associated with academic competence (Scales & Gibbons, 1996). Concluding from the literature on the subject, adults outside the family system should not become substitutes to parents (cf. Darling, Hamilton & Diego, 1994). Instead, ideally they should offer a supplement to them and a "pulling force" into adulthood by creating arenas for adult – adolescent interaction, thus providing opportunities for identification.

Considering the limited amount of work that exists within this area, I find that, in order to extend our knowledge of integrative issues in identity development, we need further understanding of adolescents' perceptions, feelings and interactions with adults also other than their parents. In the present work focus is placed on contacts between adolescents and adults both inside and outside the family system. The term "contact", as opposed to "relationship", was chosen in order to emphasize that the aim is to include all types of personal interaction between the adolescent and the adult, not merely those characterised by emotional closeness (cf. Darling, Hamilton & Diego, 1994). This issue was explored in studies I and II. In the first study the questionnaire contained questions about the relationships with parents. Further, about adults in general, and also the school system, and finally in relation to existential issues. In the second study two questions were asked; the first referred to what adult persons were included in the respondents' lives, and the second to whether respondents felt the need for adults in their lives. Few previous studies have adopted this approach of asking adolescents themselves about who they consider to be important in their lives (Scales & Gibbons, 1996).

To summarize, my research interest within this last domain, concerns who adolescents count as significant adults in their lives and what they find important in these relationships. This area is probed in order to better understand concurrent factors outside the individual that may be influencing the process of identity development (see Figure 2, p. 31).

PURPOSE OF THE THESIS

In order to clarify the relationship between my overall research interest in the present thesis, the three domains just decribed, and the specific questions addressed in each of the three studies, it is time for a short summary again (see Figure 1, p. 13, and Figure 2, p. 31).

First, in order to explore and elucidate identity development during late adolescence, this thesis asks three specific questions; a) how do adolescents perceive and describe themselves? b) what do they consider important in their lives? and c) how do they describe their contacts with adult people? These three questions can be linked to the previously discussed dimensions of identity (function, content, result and process) in the following way: The first question is primarily concerned with the result dimension (partly in terms of predefined "qualities" such as self-love and consistency, but also in terms of free self-descriptions). The second question is related to the content dimension, that is, what is happening inside the individual at this time in life, what does her/his thoughts generally focus around? These two questions emphasize intrapersonal issues, that is, the questions are primarily concerned with the individual her/himself. In contrast, the third domain, adolescents' contacts with adult persons, is directed towards interpersonal and process oriented identity issues. My rational for studying both intra- and interpersonal issues is a result of my theoretical foundation where identity formation is viewed as a reciprocal process between the individual and her environment. Finally, the function of identity is not specifically addressed in any of the three studies.

Second, in order to answer these three questions, the following empirical questions and assumptions were investigated in the three studies. The first study focused on a) the characteristics of the adolescents' self-concept in terms of self-love and self-control b), the content of their existential questions but also who adolescents communicate these issues with and c), connections between a) and b). The major goal of Study II was to study the same areas as in the previous study, but now by using the adolescents' own reflections on themselves and themselves in relation to others (in contrast to the forced choice methods of Study I). Three questions were probed; what do adolescents say on the subjects of a) themselves, b) their existential questions, and c) their adult contacts. Study II is also a longitudinal study where data have been gathered on a second occasion. The third study differs slightly from the two first, as it only addresses the issue of adolescents' self-concepts. The overall purpose here was to compare adolescents' self-concepts (16- and 18-year olds), with the self-concepts of adults with specific focus on self-love, self-control and self-concept consistency. Thus, in this study the developmental aspect is more prominent than in Studies I and II. In sum, Study I and II are explorative/descriptive in three different domains, whereas Study III focuses on one domain and also makes a number of specific assumptions that are tested.

PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE CHOICE OF METHODS

The approach to the problem is more important than
the problem itself... for your prejudices, your fears
and your hopes will colour it.
The correct relation results from a lucid approach without selection.
(Krishnamurti)

To clarify the ontological and epistemological framework of this thesis, three issues will be discussed in the following section; *quality vs. quantity, explanation vs. understanding* and *reality vs. relativity*. In addition, I will give a brief description of the design and methods used in the three studies.

Psychology has a multicoloured history and an apparent "identity problem" (Kimble, 1984) with regard to its scientific approaches. This situation is based on the sharply polarised opinions about the epistemological base of psychology as a discipline. Two conflicting cultures (cf. Snow, 1964) exist within the same field. These two cultures have been juxtaposed at certain times, at other times, one has dominated the other. Around the turn of the century Wilhelm Wundt was searching for basic laws by means of the experimental model in order to explain human mental processes. Simultaneously, Wilhelm Dilthey argued that psychology should be a science about understanding human thoughts, feelings and behaviour based on the hermeneutic approach (Egidius, 1977). During the 20's and 30's the two models existed parallel to each other, that is, personal experience was as frequently discussed as statistical data in the scientific journals of that time (Hayes, 1997). This situation changed together with the scientific gains of behaviourism during the following decades. For a number of years the reductionist approach was advocated, and the search for basic elements of human behaviour was considered the only way of performing psychological research. During the 70's and 80's behaviourism as such was rejected and replaced by (what is sometimes labelled) the cognitive "revolution" (Hayes, 1997). However, the emphasis of finding single causes in order to explain human behaviour and mental processes was retained. In line with the model of physical experimentation, reliability was still equated with replicability, and validity was primarily judged by comparisons with pre-existing criteria. Thus, qualitative methods focusing on the meaning making and unique experiences of individuals were devalued for a number of decades.

During the 80's and 90's a growing interest of qualitative approaches has emerged. By some researchers these are used as a complement to the previous range of methods whilst others replace positivist methodologies altogether with a qualitative approach. This situation elicits the question of what we actually mean by the terms qualitative and quantitative; are we talking about methods (collecting and analysing data) or an entire philosophy of research? In the latter case, can qualitative research always be connected with an idealistic epistemology and quantitative always with the realist? Hammersley (1992) suggests seven, what he labels component meanings, to illustrate "the qualitative and quantitative divide", adopted and discussed by Hayes (see Table 1). Rather than talking in dichotomies Hayes (1997) suggests that each one of these component meanings is better conceived of as a continuum. For example, qualitative data may be gathered and analysed through an inductive just as well as a hypothetico deductive approach. Further, research in a natural setting may be controlled just as in the artificial setting (and the reverse) and focus on meaning or behaviour does not necessarily implicate the use of qualitative or quantitative data, respectively. Hayes' discussion reveals that although qualitative research often leans more heavily towards the left side of the table (i.e., qualitative data, natural settings, focus on meaning etc.) and quantitative more to the right (i.e., quantitative data, artificial settings, focus on behaviour etc.), the issue is often more complex than a simple either – or situation. Thus, the dualism between understanding and explanation can be questioned; the two terms/traditions need not necessarily be opposed to each other. Instead, understanding and explanation can be viewed as two components in a dialectical process, where understanding is mediated through explanation and explanations in turn are accomplished by means of understanding (Ricoeur, 1991). From this follows a research model that is also

Table 1. *Seven component meanings of the qualitative/quantitative divide. After Hayes (1997), adapted from Hammersley (1992).*

1. Qualitative vs quantitative data
2. Natural vs artificial setting
3. Focus on meaning rather than behaviour
4. Adoption or rejection of natural science as a model
5. An inductive vs a deductive approach
6. Identifying cultural patterns vs seeking scientific laws
7. Idealism vs realism

characterised by a dialectic movement between qualitative and quantitative data, induction and deduction, and open for the search for cultural patterns as well as universal laws. In line with this, the ontological/epistemological position in this thesis closest resembles that of critical realism. In terms of reality vs. relativity, critical realism assumes the existence of a real world, predating both our experience of it and the language we use to describe it (Willig, 1998). In contrast to social constructionist views (where language is considered to constitute reality and subjective experience), critical realism holds the idea that language has a constructive function but also *is about* something, that is, there is a reality preceding language. Thus, we need to ask questions of both form (i.e., "how?") and content (i.e., "what?"). In other words, objective reality restricts the stories or constructs we generate, "we cannot simply make up and continue to use any 'story'" (Berzonsky, 1993, p. 170). Further, critical realism considers reality as multilayered, which in turn allows for different models and approaches in terms of, for instance, objective vs. subjective truth. In contrast to empiricism, there is a strong emphasis on the need of a contextual and interactive perspective. In addition, human sciences are viewed as dealing with open systems (i.e., a number of factors and mechanisms are always involved) and, therefore, more suitable for specifying tendencies in multicomponent models rather than making predictions from single isolated variables and mechanisms. As a consequence, quality in this research model must be evaluated accordingly. That is, different uses and interpretations of the terms validity and reliability must be, first, acknowledged and, second, kept apart as qualitatively, not quantitatively, different from each other (Collier, 1998).

The choice of critical realism as ontological and epistemological framework generates the following implications for the present thesis. In terms of theoretical aspects on the concept of identity, this can be viewed as both *assigned* and *constructed* (cf., Berzonsky, 1993). That is, there are parts of one's identity where "reality hits " the individual. Gender, race, and adoption are examples of assigned identities where the individual has no (or little!) option but to accept the facts. Vocation, occupation and ideology on the other hand, are all aspects open for individual and subjective choice. However, it is important to note here that different types of cultures and societies leave different room for the individual's choice and options for a self-constructed identity. In the context of this thesis (i.e., modern Western society), autonomy and individuality have been heavily emphasized for a long time (see Rakoff, 1978; 1981), whereas other cultures instead emphasize the connectedness between individuals within a community (Greene, Shelton Smith, & Peters, 1995).

The implications of critical realism for the choice of design and methods, is a multimethodological approach. This resulted, in my case, in a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in the three studies. For data collection the following methods were used (see Table 2); short essay writings, questionnaires, a personality inventory, sentence completion tasks and interviews (the reader is directed to the method sections of each study for further details on these methods).

Table 2. *Overview of the methods used in the three studies.*

Methods	**Study I**	**Study II**	**Study III**
Essays	X		
Questionnaires	X		X
Personality inventory	X		X
Sentence completion tasks		X	
Interviews		X	

The methods of analysis ranged from descriptive, uni- and multivariate statistics and non-parametric measures of the quantitative data, to content and interpretive analyses of the qualitative data obtained in the interviews and the written materials. The quantitative/qualitative split is still evident in that each study is using either one or the other approach. The merge lies in the conjoint discussion at the end of the thesis. Another alternative would have been to reject this split fully and instead merge the methods completely (see for instance Wirén, 1999, where quantitative, longitudinal data have been treated like text). The reason for choosing the former and not the latter, is my own development as a researcher rather than anything else. At the time when this work was planned, I was not prepared to go beyond the quantity/quality division further than this. A doctoral thesis should, apart from being a contribution of knew knowledge in a specified field, also be viewed as an examination work of an apprentice. That is, it involves a learning process in relation to (amongst other things) methods. Thus, my decision was to learn my tools better before I started using them in too "unorthodox" manners (much in line with the thought that a musician cannot improvise successfully before (s)he has learnt to play her/his instrument well).

In terms of design, Study I and II are single group studies and Study III uses a cross-sectional design, including three different age groups. Study I is a descriptive and correlational survey, a first step in penetrating my field of interest. The advantage of survey studies is that they provide an easy way of covering a large field so as to get a first picture of distributions and possible relationships. The disadvantage is, of course, that they often lack in depth and do not allow any deeper theoretical analyses. To gain depth, the second study was, therefore, designed as an unstructured interview study, including only a small sample of adolescents. During the course of work with Study I and II, a number of questions, assumptions and hypotheses arose which resulted in Study III. Here, four specific assumptions connected to development and change of adolescents' self-concept were examined in two groups of adolescents and one group of adults. The choice of a crossectional design needs to be discussed in relation to the longitudinal design. A crossectional design does limit the discussion of results in developmental cause and effect terms. True age change can be confused with mere age differences (Kausler, 1991) and, Bergman, Eklund, & Magnusson (1991) argue that if we want to understand and explain individual development, no alternatives exist to the longitudinal design. There are no reasons for disagreeing with this, but, the limitations of longitudinal research in terms of time and other types of resources, made it unsuitable for this project. Instead, a crossectional design was chosen as the only practical alternative within the boundaries of a doctoral thesis. (However, Study II is in fact a longitudinal project where a second data collection has been made.)

STUDY I – III

Summary Study I

"My questions of life are questions of the future!"
(Johnny, 18 years)

The purpose of Study I was to explore identity development during late adolescence (18-20 years) using mainly quantitative methods. The population consisted of 44 Swedish students (upper secondary school). Three areas were examined: a) adolescents' self-concepts, b) adolescents' existential questions, and c) the relationship between a) and b).

The first area was studied by means of a personality inventory; Structural Analysis of Social Behaviour (SASB), a method for evaluating the individual's internalised self-concept (i.e., the introject) and interpersonal behaviour (Benjamin, 1974; 1994). The model is based on two dimensions; affiliation vs. disaffiliation ("love") and independence vs. interdependence ("control"). Questions of (self)love and (self)control were assumed to be central to the individual during the adolescent stage, hence the choice of method. In this study the use of the SASB method was limited to the introject part, a questionnaire comprising 36 items where self-ratings are made on a 0 - 100 scale. The results for each subject are presented as eight cluster-values and four coefficients. In addition, the participants were also asked, to what extent they felt satisfied and at ease with themselves, judged on a scale from 1 - 5.

The results showed that the majority of the group expressed a positive and stable self-concept. However, a group of ten subjects demonstrated a significantly more unstable self-concept in comparison to the rest of the group. This group also included all subjects who stated that they had attempted to commit suicide at least once. In addition, they were significantly more mentally occupied with the thought of suicide then the rest of the group.

The second area, adolescents' existential questions, was examined with a questionnaire based on the results from a short essay ("My questions of life") written previously by the same respondents. The questions referred to content (i.e., what do adolescents regard as important existential issues that they often think about?) and patterns of communication (i.e., do they talk with anybody about these issues, in that case with whom?). The questionnaire also explored ways of relating to one's future, aims of life, religious beliefs/theories of life, suicide and the previously mentioned question related to the self-concept.

Major findings within this area were as follows. The respondents' existential questions were mainly related to their personal future, a topic which was also discussed with both parents and peers. However, other issues, such as death, religious beliefs/theories of life and the question "Who am I" were less frequently thought and talked about. Striking features in this section were the low ratings for communication with adults other than the parents, that adults' interest in young people's existential questions was perceived as very low, and that the time in school spent on existential questions was rated as insufficient by a majority of the participants.

The third and last area this study intended to explore was the relationship between adolescents' self-concept and their existential questions. An underlying assumption was that the quality of self-concept and the possibility to verbalize questions and theories of life in interaction with others could be related to each other.

The results here showed that the quality of the self-concept (positive versus negative, measured by SASB), was related to the experienced interest from adults. That is, a positive self-concept was strongly connected to respondents believing adults to be genuinely interested in their existential questions. Also, a positive self-concept in terms of high ratings of self-satisfaction was significantly related to a higher amount of communication with others on existential topics than for those with low ratings on self-satisfaction. Our conclusions here were that adults' interest and response towards the adolescent's existential questions is one important factor in the process of identity development. Further support for this assumption was given by the group who scored low on the SASB coefficient of consistency mentioned previously. In this group, eight out of ten subjects stated that they never talked to anyone about their existential questions, seven also stated that they did not think that adults were interested in these questions.

Finally, the results of the study are discussed in relation to contemporary psychodynamic theories on identity development, stressing the importance of the social environment for identity development not only during childhood but also during adolescence. In addition, the use of the SASB method (not previously used in this age group) together with the need for placing processes of integration into focus in research concerning late adolescence are commented and discussed.

Summary Study II

" (adults)...they have a lot of experience and see things from a different perspective...they have gone through all the things me and my friends go through right now... they know things and you can trust them... and my Mum, she is just always right, isn't that strange? Like always!
(Julia, 18 years)

The purpose of Study II was to explore late adolescents' self-concept, their existential questions and their contacts with adults through the adolescents' own reflections on themselves and themselves in relation to others. That is, an inductive rather than a deductive method was used when in-depth, unstructured interviews were performed with twelve adolescents (Swedish students, 16 – 19 years).

The respondents were selected as follows. In a data collection prior to this study, a written enquiry was included as to whether the participants would agree to be interviewed on the topic of "themselves". From the original sample of 98 students, 37 students agreed to participate and 12 of these were chosen in line with Cohen and Manion's (1980) two principles of qualitative samples; dimensional and purposive sampling. Dimensional sampling involves choosing one or more characteristic(s) of theoretical interest; in the current study age and gender. Purposive sampling is based on the investigator's subjective knowledge of the subjects. Here, students' answers on a sentence completion task ("When I reflect upon myself, I think...") were used.

The interviews were conducted in the form of conversations structured around the three topics; self-concept, existential questions and contacts with adults. The purpose was to penetrate the student's own way of thinking within these three domains. An interview guide, rather than a structured interview questionnaire was used. Four main questions were always asked (and asked in the same order); "Please tell me who you are", "What do you find important in your life right now, what do you often find yourself thinking about?", "Who are the adult persons in your life?" and "Do you think it is important to have adults in your life, and, if so, why?". The analysis was performed with a hermeneutic, inductive perspective with empathic and interpretative understanding as key concepts (Jensen, 1989; Karlsson, 1993).

The results from the first domain (adolescents' self-concept) were presented as twelve part aspects of the self-concept, further condensed into four self-concept dimensions, in turn placed into a proposed model of adolescent identity. The result showed that expressions of self-related emotions were rare. Instead, the question "What sort of a person *am* I ?" was frequently transformed into another question; "What sort of a person *should* I be?" These reflections often involved an attempt to balance the needs and wishes of oneself in relation to others.

The analysis of the second domain (adolescents' existential questions) contained two parts. First, a content analysis of the issues that the respondents brought up for discussion. By abstracting and compiling quotations and meaning units, the material could be grouped into five content areas; oneself as a person, relationships with other people, activity related issues, time related issues (i.e., statements that explicitly contained the words "future", "past" or "present") and the world at large (issues related to pollution, war and starvation). Second, a time-filter was applied to the results of the first part. This revealed that issues to do with the past were rare, issues to do with the present more common whereas issues to do with the future were represented by all respondents but one.

The results of the third domain (adolescents' contacts with adults) showed that adult contacts outside the family were scarce to the majority of the respondents. However, contacts with parents and close family were often described in a warm and positive way, in contrast to descriptions of teachers. All respondents expressed the need for adults in their lives as sources of knowledge and experience. This knowledge could be further divided into three types; *personal, interactional* and *factual* knowledge.

In sum, the results of this study indicated that identity development during late adolescence consists of integrative issues; to balance and control one's needs and wishes in relation to others' and to find a place for oneself in the future. The results also indicated that one important factor in this process is the availability of adults who are willing to share their interactional knowledge and experience with the adolescent. These findings both validate and extend the results of the preceding study.

Summary Study III

"I am a calm sort of person... but very temperamental!"
(Tom, 17 years)

In Study III the overall purpose was to compare the self-concepts of two groups of adolescents (16- and 18-year olds) with each other, and with a group of adults. Specific focus was put on three aspects; affiliation, interdependence and consistency. This was done, as in Study I, using the introject part of the personality inventory, Structural Analysis of Social Behaviour (SASB; Benjamin, 1974; 1994) where the underlying assumption is that both human behaviour and the self-concept can be described as the joint expression of affiliation and interdependence.

The results from the two previous studies provided background and support for making four specific assumptions. First, adolescents' self-concepts would differ from adults' with respect to questions of interdependence, but not on questions related to affiliation. Second, adolescents would rate themselves less consistently than adults. Third, these differences would also occur within the adolescent group, that is between 16-year olds and 18-year olds. Fourth, an inconsistent self-concept in the adolescent group would be related to risk factors, in this study defined as active suicide attempts.

The population consisted of 201 Swedish students (upper secondary school) with a mean age of 16,5 (n=77; f=38, m=39) or 18,5 years (n=124; f=69, m=55). To obtain a representative distribution with respect to socio-economic factors the respondents were drawn from classes aiming towards further education as well as from vocational classes. The results were compared with a non-clinical sample of 52 adults (f=28, m=24) with a mean age of 33 years (range 20 – 56; Bodlund & Armelius, 1994). In addition to the SASB inventory all participants were also inquired about suicide attempts.

(It should be noted that out of the 201 adolescent subjects, 44 took part in Study I. However, they were not discussed in relation to the topic of age differences and the data are subsequently not reported twice.)

The analysis was performed by means of a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) and Mann Whitney U-tests. The results confirmed three of the initial four assumptions, whereas the results concerning the proposed differences between 16- and 18-year olds were mixed.

First, as predicted, the adolescents differed from the adults on the dimension of interdependence but not with regard to affiliation. Second, adolescents overall rated themselves less consistently than adults, a pattern that was not repeated when 16- and 18-year olds were compared to each other. However, there was a significant difference between 16- and 18-year olds with respect to inner control. Finally, inconsistency was clearly linked to suicide attempts. In addition two different groups of inconsistent individuals were found; those *with* an inner conflict (ambivalent) and *without* inner conflict (unintegrated). Interestingly, the ambivalent individuals appeared even more at risk than the unintegrated individuals (however, the number of observations in some of the cells in the Chi Square analyses were small, and these results must be interpreted cautiously).

In all, the findings indicated a developmental pattern where a) inner control and consistency are still subject to development and change during adolescence, b) self-love has been consolidated at earlier stages and c), inconsistency should be viewed as an undesirable developmental pattern in this age group. In addition, we proposed that consistency can be a) halted (or slowed down) resulting in an unintegrated self-concept, or b) turned into a different direction resulting in a conflicted self-concept. However, these suggestions must be regarded as tentative, and in need of further examination together with questions of correlates and the underlying cause(s) of inconsistency.

SUMMARIES AND DISCUSSIONS

The overall purpose of the present thesis was to explore the subject of identity development during late adolescence. Three specific questions were asked, a) how do adolescents perceive and describe themselves? b) what do they consider important in their lives? and c) how do they describe their contacts with adult people? Thus, three domains were investigated; adolescents' self-concepts, adolescents' existential questions and adolescents' contacts with adults. These three domains were explored and investigated in three separate studies by means of questionnaires, sentence completion tasks, short essays, a personality inventory, and interviews. The methods of analysis ranged from statistical methods to qualitative content and interpretive analyses.

The discussion will be structured in the following way. First, in order to answer the three specific questions, the results of each of the three domains will be summarized and discussed separately. Here, the main proportion will be centred around the first domain, adolescents' self-concepts. Second, in order to address the overall purpose of the thesis, some of the results from the three domains will then be discussed jointly.

Adolescents' Self-Concept, Existential Questions and Adult Contacts

Let the reader therefore understand
that the facts were what I say they were,
but the interpretation that I give them
is what I am – now.
(J. Genet, 1954)

Adolescents' Self-Concept

The results from the first domain will be discussed in three parts; evaluative aspects of the self-concept, unity and coherence, and finally, questions of inner control.

Evaluative aspects. Study I and III revealed that the majority of the participants had a positive self-concept. That is, most adolescents had a self-concept characterized by self-love rather than self-hate and also answered that they were generally happy and pleased with themselves. A positive self-concept was also significantly related to a number of positive factors such as good parental relationships, a positive outlook on both self and life in general, and a stronger belief in adults' interest in young people's existential questions than what was found in the individuals with a negative self-concept. Thus, the results here contradict what Coleman and Hendry (1990) refer to as "the classical view" of adolescence (cf. Blos, 1967; Erikson, 1959; Havighurst, 1953), that is, as a time of severe turbulence and emotional stress. Instead, and in line with more recent identity theory and research (Coleman & Hendry, 1990; Garrod et al. 1995; Offer, Rostov, & Howard, 1981; Offer, Rostov, & Howard, 1984), the results corroborate with the view that the adolescent transition is relatively untroubled to the majority of young people. These results are also important to emphasize at a time when discussions about adolescents are often focused on problems and distress. There is no denial that drug exposure, racism, violence and unemployment together with diminishing resources in society, are just a few examples of what young people of today have to face. However, there is a fundamental difference between the individual's ability to handle these issues which is related to her view of herself. Having a secure and positive inner platform helps in times when insecurity and problems dominate the outside world.

In the interview study, self evaluation was not common. That is, when asked to describe themselves, the question of self-love (or self-hate) was not an issue that the participants spontaneously came to think of. In addition, in Study III no differences were found between adolescents and adults in terms of self-love and self-hate. The conjoint results here indicate that questions of self-love and self-hate are aspects of the self-concept that are mainly consolidated before adolescence.

To summarize the results in this section, we may conclude that having a positive self-concept is by far more common than having a negative self-concept. In addition, having a positive self-concept is also related to a number of other positive factors. However, self evaluations does not seem to be a major identity issue at this developmental stage. This last finding was a result of using unstructured interviews where the respondents were asked to speak freely of themselves and their lives. Thus, the results in this section also point to the importance of using research methods where the respondents' own structures of thought are revealed, in contrast to methods where the subject of interest is predefined by the researcher (i.e., tests, questionnaires, structured interviews; cf., Archer, 1993; Darling, Hamilton & Niego, 1994).

Unity and coherence. Study I and III revealed that most participants had a unified self-concept. That is, the ability to rate themselves in a coherent and consistent manner was high amongst the adolescents. However, consistency in the adolescent samples was significantly lower than in the adult sample they were compared with. This implies a developmental trend (i.e., moving from low to high consistency) which fits well with the psychodynamic view that unity and coherence is one of the hall marks of a mature identity (Erikson, 1959).

The fact that high consistency seemingly indicates a mature identity would, in the reverse, indicate that low consistency would signal an immature identity. However, the results of Study I showed that very low consistency was linked to a number of negative factors (e.g., feeling discontent with oneself, lacking belief in adults' interest in young people's existential questions, suicide ideation and suicide attempts). Low consistency, thus appeared to be more complex than just being a sign of immaturity. Hence, instead of using consistency as a unipolar dimension (i.e., high consistency – low consistency), it may be more relevant to talk about a bipolar dimension, stretching from high consistency to inconsistency. Here, low consistency would be connected to an immature self-concept, whereas inconsistency would signal something which is more problematic. This assumption was in fact tried out in Study III where the total sample was divided into two groups; inconsistent individuals vs. consistent individuals. These two groups were then compared in relation to their answers regarding active suicide attempts. The results showed, as in Study I, that inconsistency was significantly related to active suicide attempts. Suicide ideation occurs frequently during adolescence (Adamson, 1993; Santrock, 1998) and cannot be used as a single measure to determine the high-risk from the non-risk adolescents. However, the results from this thesis indicate that identifying those with an inconsistent self-concept may be one way of detecting adolescents with severe suicidal problems.

Another finding in Study III was that the inconsistent group could be subdivided into one unintegrated and one ambivalent group. That is, some individuals rated themselves in a generally diffused manner, whereas some rated themselves in a systematically conflicted manner. The results here indicated that the ambivalent group was even more prone to suicide attempts than the unintegrated group. One way of interpreting these data is that unintegration here is an aspect of delayed development, whereas ambivalence is related to more severe psychopathology. However, it is important to note here that due to the small groups these results should only be used as indicators for further research.

All in all, on the subject of unity and coherence of the self-concept the results of this thesis show that normal development runs from low to high consistency. Further, that inconsistency is related to a number of negative factors and should therefore be considered as a negative developmental pattern. Finally, sense of hopelessness, depression and anger have previously been listed as strongly associated with adolescent suicide attempts (Spirito, Brown, Overholser, & Fritz, 1989). The results of this work points to the fact that self-concept inconsistency is another important factor to take into consideration in this field. Thus, determining the level of self-concept (in)consistency may be an additional way of determining the psychological profile of suicidal adolescents.

Inner control. The two previous sections (i.e., self-evaluations and unity/ coherence) were mainly based on results from quantitative measures were the respondents were confronted with already defined questions and a number of set alternatives for response. In Study II the aim was to catch the area of adolescents' self-concept from a different angle. Here, the respondents were asked to describe and talk about themselves spontaneously and with as little interference from the interviewer as possible.

The results here showed that the respondents frequently talked about *themselves in relation to other people.* Further, this was not done through a comparative (and thus, evaluative) perspective. Instead, a common theme was how the respondents struggled with questions that had to do with balancing and controlling their own needs and wishes in relation to other people's. Questions like "will the teacher lower my grades because of the opinions I expressed during class", "will my friend still like me in spite of what I just said" or opposite, "why didn't I tell him or her off when (s)he teased me" occurred frequently. The underlying issue appeared to concern how much life-space it is possible to demand in a relationship and how much you need to leave for the other person (e.g., "should I make room for myself or the other", "is the issue important enough to pursue or can I leave it in aid of avoiding an unnecessary conflict" or, "does the other need my attention and concern more than I need hers or his right now"). Two different types of unsatisfactory solutions to these questions can be anticipated here. First, by focusing too much on the other person the adolescent diminishes or even extinguishes her/himself in the relationship. The second outcome involves the opposite situation; the individual rules out the other person and solely acts in her/his own interest. In the long run this includes the risk of ultimately becoming rejected and isolated from others. That is, in allowing too little space for yourself you run the risk of losing yourself. On the other hand, in giving too little to others, you run the risk of losing them. Subsequently, reaching a satisfactory solution to these questions would include developing an ability to continuously make relevant judgements in terms of life space in each new situation. To do so, the adolescent must first become aware of her/his interactional patterns and, second, also develop and internalise this interactional skill. The results of Study II indicate that these interactional skills develop in the interaction with adult people, an issue that will be discussed in more detail below.

In sum, interactional issues related to the question of how to balance and regulate one's behaviour in relation to others, were dominating issues when the respondents described and talked about themselves. These results have been further supported in a quantitative follow up study, including 154 late adolescents (Adamson, 1999; Adamson, Hartman & Lyxell 1998). In Study I and III inner control was measured by means of the SASB inventory. The results here showed that adolescents scored significantly lower on inner control than adults, and, the 16-year olds scored even lower than the 18-year olds, suggesting a developmental pattern running from low to high control. All three studies, thus, indicate that issues of inner control seem particularly important during this developmental period. Further, questions of inner control often involve other people, and are, subsequently, related to questions of social integration. Hence, the results of this section corroborate that identity development during late adolescence evolves more around questions of (social) integration than about separating oneself from others (cf., Adams & Marshall, 1996; Ramström, 1991). The results also very clearly illustrate what identity development involves on a concrete, day to day interactional basis, that is, how the fine art of "balancing between self and others" (cf. Kroger, 1996a) is practised in the daily interactions between the adolescent and her/his peers, teachers and parents.

Adolescents' Existential Questions – Questions of Future

An existential question in this thesis was defined as a central theme of interest to the individual at the time of inquiry. In Study I the respondents were asked to write a short essay on the subject of "My questions of life". The essays were then used to construct a questionnaire. In this questionnaire not only questions of how often subjects thought of certain issues were probed, questions were also asked around whom one usually talked to. In Study II respondents were asked to give their own spontaneous answers on this subject, again with minimal interference from the interviewer.

The results from both studies very clearly show that questions of life in this age group are equal to questions of one's personal future (cf., Nurmi, 1991). This was the dominating theme in the essays and in the quantitative results from the questionnaire, outweighing alternatives such as "the meaning of life in general", "who am I", and questions of death. In the interviews, ten out of twelve respondents moved rapidly into the topic of their own future when asked about what they found important in their lives. Thus, the individual differences here were less related to content and more to how well articulated and (seemingly) well anchored in reality their answers were (cf. Nurmi, 1991; see also Black & Gregson, 1973; Rychlack, 1973; Trommsdorff & Lamm, 1980).

Furthermore, the results of Study I indicated a relationship between the respondents' self-concept and their outlook on their future life (viz., a negative self-concept was significantly related to the disbelief in one's ability to realise one's future plans and not looking forward to entering the adult world). In Study II, this relationship can be illustrated by Hugo. Hugo was constantly referring to his unhappy past and not even when probed about his future did he comment very much on this subject. However, after telling his story, and by the very end of the interview, he was suddenly able to look ahead in life. (He then defined his future more in terms of negations of his past, rather than in terms of positive and optimistic dreams, as in the case of many of the other respondents.) That is, the respondent in this study with the most problematic life story, did not spontaneously talk about his future. In addition (and not reported in Study II) the SASB results showed that he also had an inconsistent self-concept as opposed to ten out of the eleven other respondents. Thus, having a negative picture of one's future or no picture at all, was in this study related to an inconsistent self-concept and also to troublesome life conditions both at present and in the past. A reanalysis of data from Study I, did in fact reveal that a pessimistic outlook on one's future was significantly lower in the group of ten respondents characterised by an inconsistent self-concept as compared to the rest of the group (M (inconsistent) = 3.0, M (consistent) = 3.7, $\underline{t}$ (42) = 2.5, $p<.01$). In addition, these results have been further corroborated in a recent study by Adamson (1999), where pessimistic images of the future were significantly correlated to an inconsistent self-concept. It is important to emphasize here that the issue concerns personal future images as opposed to future images in general. Studies on adolescents' future images have generated quite contradictory results in terms of pessimism and optimism. This variation can often be explained by variations in future perspective; personal or general. Many adolescents view the future of the world in very pessimistic manners. However, the majority believe in their own future, whereas only a small number of adolescents have a more pessimistic view (Adamson, 1993; Nurmi, personal communication, June, 1998). These results correspond to the proportions of consistent vs. inconsistent self-concepts in both Study I and III. Thus, the overall empirical pattern suggests that these two groups belong to the same population; self-concept inconsistency and pessimistic future images are definitely linked together.

To summarize this section, existential questions during this developmental period mainly consist of questions related to one's personal future (e.g., future education, work, family etc.). Hence, in addition to finding (and defining) oneself in an interpersonal context, identity development also involves finding oneself in a larger societal context. A relationship between adolescents' future images and their self-concept was also established. Thus, in view of the results related to an inconsistent self-concept, adolescents with a pessimistic view of their future should be considered a group in need of special observation. This applies to both clinical and educational settings as well as to further research. The results also point out that the relationship between absence of future images and the quality of the self-concept needs to be further examined.

Adolescents' Contacts With Adults – Positive but Rare

The two previous domains focused primarily on intrapersonal issues, that is, questions related mostly to the individual her/himself. This third domain, was chosen in order to also examine factors outside the individual that may be influential to adolescent identity development.

In Study I the respondents were asked to rate three areas; a) the quality of their relationships with their parents (mother and father respectively), b) whom they usually talked to about their existential questions and c) how they perceived adults' interest in young people's existential questions. The last area also included questions about how the educational system handled these issues. These three areas were then related to the respondents' self-concept in terms of positive or negative. In Study II, respondents were simply asked to describe their contacts with adults, both in terms of who they were but also whether they thought these contacts were important or not. Thus, in Study I "adults" were predetermined to range from parents to other adults, and finally to school as a representative of the adult world. In Study II the respondents themselves decided their own range.

The results of Study I showed that the majority rated their parental relationships very highly. These results are consistent with a number of studies (Galbo, 1984; Galbo, 1986; Riviera & Short, 1967; Yinger, Ikeda, & Laycock, 1970) where parents were listed as the most significant adults in most adolescents' lives (although a lesser frequency of interaction has been reported in adolescent – adult relations as adolescents' age increases; Montemayor & Van Komen, 1980). Further, the results showed that existential questions were mostly discussed with peers and somewhat less with one's parents. Very few respondents talked about these issues with adults other than parents, and many also experienced that adults' interest in young people's existential questions was low. In addition, the respondents wanted more time at school for these issues but not necessarily at home. Study I also showed a clear relationship between adolescents' self-concept and their belief in adults' interest in young people's existential questions. The results of Study II, confirmed Study I in the sense that contacts with adults outside the family were scarce. It is worth noting that the majority of respondents did not spontaneously mention teachers when asked about the adults in their lives (cf. Galbo, 1986; Hauck, 1971). However, all respondents, regardless of positive or negative previous experiences of adults (here; parents) were of the opinion that adults are important to have around. The reason given was that adults, in contrast to peers, have a lot of knowledge and experience. When further analysed, "adult knowledge" could be subdivided into three categories; personal, factual and interactional knowledge. That is, adult people can give a sense of personal roots and history, they can help out with practical things and, maybe most important in this context, they can engage in a dialogue with the adolescent about how to be and behave in relation to other people. These results support and elaborate previous suggestions that adult influence has an impact on the development of adolescents' self-concept (Galbo, 1984; Scales & Gibbons, 1996). That is, in order to find answers to the question "who am I supposed to be in relation to other people" the adolescent takes help from adults. By giving advice, examples and opinions on interpersonal situations earlier described by the adolescent, the adult person can provide a basis for the adolescent to further develop what was previously labelled her/his interactional skills. In conclusion, this adolescent - adult interaction may be seen as an *intersection of identity and context*, providing an important window into the mechanisms of the developmental process from an adolescent to an adult identity.

Finally, previous research on the topic of adolescents and adult interactions have seldom explored the meanings and implications of adolescents' own responses in this area (Darling, Hamilton & Niego, 1994; Galbo, 1984). Hence, the results in this section provide information in a field where research is both scarce and methodologically restricted.

Conclusions

In relation to the three questions asked in this thesis, the conclusions of the present work can be summarized as follows. The majority of late adolescents have a positive view of themselves. However, self-evaluations is not a central issue that one typically reflects on. Instead, many adolescents try to find answers to who they are in relation to other people. This involves balancing their own needs, wishes and opinions in relation to other people, an issue where adults can play important roles by sharing their interactional knowledge with the adolescent.

Further, the developmental pattern of adolescents' self-concept shows that issues of inner control and consistency are still subject to change (running from low to high) during this age, whereas, self-love (or self-hate) appears to have been consolidated at earlier stages. A number of negative factors (e.g., suicide attempts and low belief in adults' interest in young people's existential questions) were linked to the inability to rate oneself in a consistent manner. Thus, adolescents with an inconsistent self-concept at this age should be regarded as a population in need of further examination.

Existential questions during this developmental period generally concern one's personal future. Further, there are links between the quality of one's self-concept and personal future images. That is, the group of adolescents holding a negative view of their personal future, partly includes the group of adolescents with an inconsistent self-concept. Hence, also this group should be regarded as a group that needs to be further observed.

On the subject of adult contacts most adolescents feel the need of adults in their lives. The reason given for this is, that adult people have knowledge and experience which can be of help to the adolescent in a variety of ways, especially in relation to what was termed interactional knowledge. Hence, adolescent – adult interactions are important in the adolescent's development of self knowledge and subsequently in the identity formation process. However, many adolescents report that they have very little contact with adults outside the family. It is worth noting that many adolescents are critical to the lack of time in school for their existential questions. Also, in the interview study, teachers were never mentioned as "important people in their lives". Thus, the arenas (including the school system) that society offer to young people to discuss issues they feel are important, are clearly insufficient.

A Note on Validity

One of the major questions in relation to validity in this thesis, concern whether language (here, spoken as in the interviews or, written as in the self-report instruments) actually reflects the individual's inner world or not. That is, how can we proceed from statements such as "this is how the respondents express themselves" to "this is how they think, feel or function"? The answer is connected to the researcher's philosophical assumptions on issues to do with language and reality. Therefore, it cannot be discussed as a matter of right or wrong, but rather as a matter of choice (as in the case of how one views development as discussed previously). The present work rests on psychoanalytical assumptions about the human nature, together with the perspective of critical realism. Following this, an inner world is presupposited and language is viewed both as constructive and as expressing a content. My position here is, that the spoken and written word indeed can reflect the individual's inner world, on the condition that it is spoken or written in sincerity. This brings us to another question; how well can we trust that the respondents have answered the different tasks in a truthful and reflected manner? As already stated in Study II, the respondents were both motivated and interested in the questions that were posed. This appears to be the case also in relation to the different self-report instruments that were used. Positive remarks have been added to the forms (e.g., "these are important questions!" and "it is nice to see that someone is interested"), and on some occasions individuals have also stayed on after the data collection, in order to continue talking about what they just have written about. My conclusion is that most respondents have answered both truthfully and in a reflected manner.

The last question in relation to validity concerns if the results can be generalized to all late adolescents, or merely to certain groups. The samples of Study I and III where chosen in order to be representative with respect to both gender and socio-economic status. Thus, the results should be representative of "late adolescents in upper secondary schools in Swedish small town settings". This group does, in fact, constitute a large proportion of all Swedish adolescents, which, in turn, means that the results can be seen as representative of the majority of Swedish adolescents (although there may be a variation in relation to the three different domains). Whether the results also can be applied to other groups of late adolescents, remains to be answered by future studies. (Study II can not be discussed in terms of statistical generalizability. For a discussion of reliability and validity in qualitative studies, the reader is directed to the methods section of that study.)

Like Circles on the Water – a Joint Discussion

Man is a knot, a web, a mesh
into which relationships are tied.
(A. de Saint-Exupéry, 1967)

In the previous sections I discussed the results of this work in relation to the three specific questions of the thesis. In the following section I will gather the results and conclusions in a conjoint discussion of the empirical pattern that has emerged from the studies. This is in order to address the overall purpose of the thesis.

First, some of the results of Study I and III were related to the ability vs. inability to describe oneself in a unified and coherent manner. The conclusions here were two, a), self-concept consistency is still subject to development and change during adolescence, running from low to high, b), self-concept inconsistency should be considered an undesirable developmental pattern and maybe even a warning signal in this age group. Thus, integrating the picture of oneself is one important step in the process of developing a mature identity.

Second, in Study II the results showed that the question "Who am I?" did not evoke as much interest as the question "Who am I in relation to others?". That is, there was a strong focus on questions to do with the self in interaction with other people. This means that the identity question of late adolescence takes place in a larger space than just within the strict boundaries of "how one is". The results also imply that adults play a specific and important role in this search. By sharing their interactional knowledge with the adolescent, (s)he can find answers to this question and gradually develop the picture of her- or himself. Subsequently, this dialogue between adolescent and adult should be viewed as one important factor in adolescent identity development.

Third, the results showed that a central theme during late adolescence concerns questions of one's personal future. Rather than trying to separate from others, most respondents were occupied with questions to do with integrating themselves into a social context by looking towards their future. Thus, a third step in the process of developing a mature identity involves creating pictures of oneself in relation to one's future.

All in all, questions of separation from others have not emerged as a central issue in the present work. Instead, and as already suggested in Study I, identity development during late adolescence needs to be discussed in terms of processes of integration (cf., Bosma et al., 1994; Grotevant, 1986; 1987; Ramström, 1991). In view of the empirical pattern just described, I also suggest that the term process of integration needs to be further divided into one *personal* and one *social* aspect (see Table 3, p. 65). Personal integration then refers to the process of creating a coherent picture of oneself. Social integration in turn, needs to be subdivided into one *interpersonal* and one *societal* aspect. Identity development then includes three areas of exploration; oneself, oneself in relation to others, and oneself in relation to society at large. Hence, it can be thought of as circles spreading on the water, where the growing diameter represents a growing distance in terms of the individuals' points of reference in relation to her/his identity questions (see Figure 3, p. 65).

Table 3. *Adolescent identity development in terms of: PROCESS OF INTEGRATION, AREA OF EXPLORATION and current IDENTITY QUESTION.*

Process of integration:	Personal integration	Social integration	
		Interpersonal	Societal
Area of exploration:	Oneself	Oneself in relation to others	Oneself in relation to society at large
Identity question:	"Who am I?"	"Who am I in relation to others?"	"Who am I in relation to my future?"

By discussing identity development in terms of three steps, there is an implicit notion of a temporal sequence between these steps. This would very elegantly fit into the developmental stage model used in this thesis. Unfortunately, reality is seldom as clear cut and logical as we would like it to be, there is nothing in the results that supports the idea that step three actually follows step two. Instead, exploring oneself in relation to others and exploring oneself in relation to society

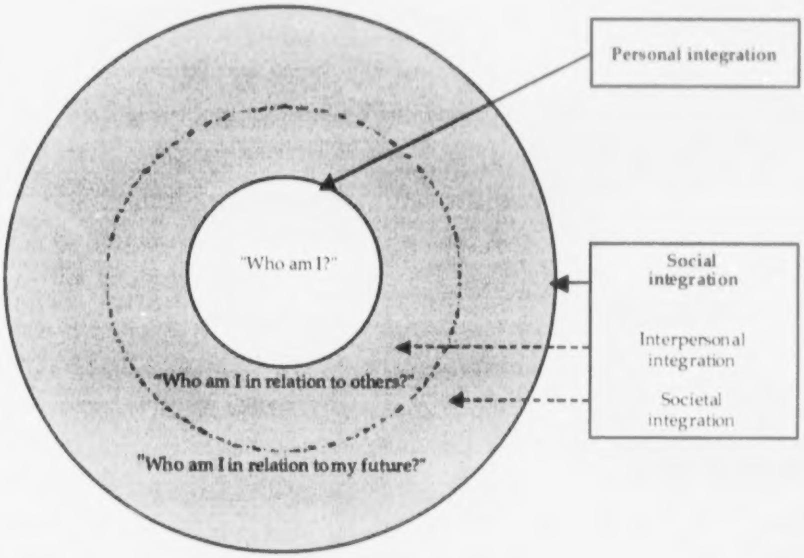
Personal integration
"Who am I?"
Social integration
Interpersonal integration
Societal integration
"Who am I in relation to others?"
"Who am I in relation to my future?"

Figure 3. Identity development: PERSONAL and SOCIAL INTEGRATION.

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at large, appear to be running parallel to each other. However, a relationship between the individual's self-concept and future images has been established. These results indicate that in order to be able to elaborate on the thoughts of one's future in a constructive manner it is first necessary to form a sufficiently clear picture of oneself. Hence, a temporal relationship exists between personal integration and societal integration. Whether this temporal relationship also exists between personal and interpersonal integration cannot be fully answered solely by data from the present work. The metaphor should, therefore, primarily be used to illustrate a surface where identity questions take place during late adolescence. If it also illustrates a developmental sequence will have to be subject for further empirical testing.

In addition, the results of the present thesis suggest that the dialogue between adolescents and adults play an important role in relation to the interpersonal aspect of social integration. Thus, the results do shed some light on factors that may promote issues of social integration. However, what facilitates personal integration is a question that still remains to be answered.

To summarize this section, identity development during late adolescence should be discussed in terms of integration rather than separation. However, integration needs to be further divided into personal (i.e., joining the picture of oneself) and social integration (i.e., finding oneself in relation to others but also to society at large). Thus, the journey from adolescence to adulthood can be described as a process where the individual is building bridges (within herself, between herself and others, and towards the future), thereby expanding the horizons of both herself and the world. This is the journey that Alice, at the very beginning of this thesis, just had embarked upon, and this is the journey every adolescent has to travel. However, on every new journey the traveller needs a map and a compass. The results of the present work show that adults have a specific and important role to fill here. By participating in an open dialogue with young people, adults can help to navigate on the road towards an integrated and mature identity.

Finally, the results of this work show that identity development during late adolescence can be illustrated by means of expanding circles. The advantage of this metaphor is, that we can move away from the previously mentioned, and criticized staircase model of development. Staircase models easily evoke the picture of an individual climbing these stairs, detached from all contextual elements, striving forever upwards and onwards, toward separation and autonomy. By illustrating the process by means of expanding circles, we can instead picture the individual at the centre of a surface which includes both her/himself and her/his (relational) context, forever joined with each other. That is, the model illustrates that identity development must always be discussed in terms of person-in-context.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions of the present study can be summarized in the following four points. The first two are related to identity theory, whereas the last two concern the actual process of identity development.

First, identity development during late adolescence needs to be *discussed* in terms of processes of integration. By using this term emphasis is put on issues to do with continuity and interaction with other people rather than autonomy and separation, terms that have dominated the field of identity development for a long time. By conceptualizing identity development in this manner contextual influences also emerge more clearly and, thus, can be better addressed in the research situation.

Second, identity development during late adolescence can be *illustrated* by means of expanding circles. The centre is constituted by the adolescent's picture of herself (i.e., personal integration), whereas the periphery consists of the adolescent's picture of herself in relation to other people and society at large (i.e., social integration). This is a picture that is well suited for a model of change and development that emphasizes the importance of contextual factors. It also provides an easy to comprehend metaphor of an otherwise complex process. This may be of use in a variety of educational settings.

Third, lack of personal integration at this age level was linked to a number of negative factors such as negative future images and suicide attempts. Hence, it should be considered to signal an undesirable developmental pattern. The results of this thesis do not provide any answers as to what type of factors that enhance personal integration. Subsequently, this is an area that needs to be further explored.

Fourth, adolescent – adult interaction is one important factor in relation to social integration. Here the adolescent learns to develop her/his interactional skills in order to regulate and balance her/his own life space in relation to others'. However, the results of this thesis also suggest that opportunities for social interaction between adolescents and adults outside their families are insufficient and need to be improved.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this section some future research themes structured around issues of integration will be shortly outlined.

In terms of personal integration the results of this thesis indicate that self-concept consistency is one important step in the identity development process. Self-concept inconsistency was related to a number of negative factors and interpreted as a sign of an unsatisfactory developmental process. Finding additional correlates and, ultimately, the cause(s) of inconsistency is one important track to pursue here. Another path is to differentiate the concept of inconsistency in line with the results from Study III; what are the implications of having a diffuse/unintegrated self-concept as compared to a conflicted/ambivalent self-concept? A third way is to, instead, broaden the concept of personal integration and view this as self-knowledge. This would elicit questions both about content and how it is attained that would transcend the methods of this work.

In relation to interpersonal integration the results indicate that the role of the adult is to mediate knowledge in a number of areas to the adolescent. Important issues to raise here concern both quantity, quality and meaning of these interactions. Further, these questions should be studied in relation to adults both within and outside the family, in order to detect any differences in these two types of relationships. In addition, this is a field where cross-cultural studies seem especially relevant.

On the subject of societal integration, creating pictures of oneself in the future was by far the most common theme in the respondents' answers about what they found important in life. The most interesting issue here to investigate further, is the relationship between adolescents' personal future images and their self-concept. If the connection between a negative and/or diffuse future orientation and the quality of the self-concept can be clearly established, this could generate useful information for clinical work with young people both in terms of methods and assessment.

Finally, knowledge develops through comparison. The samples used in the present work were drawn from the population of Swedish adolescents in upper secondary school. An important step now is to compare these results with the results from other types of populations. Culture, class, gender, adoption, physical and social disabilities are all variables that would be relevant to investigate in relation to the three domains under study in this thesis.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS: ADOLESCENT IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE EDUCATIONAL SETTING

The focus of this thesis is not related to the school system. However, school must be considered one of the most important arenas for adolescents of today. Hence, the relationship between the present work and the educational setting must be at least touched upon.

The results of the present work in relation to educational settings can be summarized as follows; the respondents were occupied with questions related to their interpersonal relationships with others and questions to do with their personal future. In addition, they expressed the need for adults in their lives and saw adults as important sources of knowledge and experience in a number of areas. However, when asked specifically about teachers, the respondents usually displayed either an indifferent ("teachers, well they are just teachers...") or a negative ("you can't trust teachers") attitude. Also, teachers were seldom spontaneously mentioned as "important adults in one's life". The majority of the respondents expressed a negative attitude towards how school handled issues of an existential nature and expressed their wish for more time here (but, important to note, not at home) to discuss these issues. In sum, the Swedish school apparently fails its students, both in creating opportunities for the social interaction across generations that adolescents themselves express their need for, and also in providing arenas for discussing what they think is important in life.

Similar types of critique against the school system has been raised for a number of years (cf. Andersson, 1995; Skolverket, 1994; Skolöverstyrelsen, 1969; 1981; Åkerberg, 1987). Thus, we need to ask why these issues seem so difficult to remedy. The answer is not to be found in the current curriculum (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1994). This is in fact in line with identity theory in the sense of emphasizing the importance of psychosocial development. However, the term identity development as such is never used which may indicate an unreflected view on this topic. A first step towards an improvement of the situation would be to articulate and problematize the issue of identity development more clearly (cf. Dreyer, 1994). On a concrete level, this would elicit a number of important questions and I suggest that two of these should be focused in particular. The first concerns the level of knowledge among school professionals about young people and their developmental needs. Closely connected to this is also the question of what teacher professionalism is, and should be, constituted by. A second important issue to raise is that of student – teacher relationships and interactions. The quality of this relationship has been listed as one of the most powerful tools in the learning process (Birnik, 1998; Galbo, 1987; Simpson & Galbo, 1986). In addition, Galbo (1987) suggests that the way teachers are perceived, influence adolescents' attitudes toward the value of the school experience, the knowledge that is offered there, and subsequently also the value of the basic tenets on which society is based. Thus, questions of adolescent – teacher interactions have implications not only for individual development, but also for society as a whole.

In conclusion, the results of this thesis has brought to surface critique about the Swedish school system that has in fact been raised before. One interpretation why this critique has not been remedied, is that the role of the educational system in relation to adolescent identity development is underrated. Hence, in order to generate an open discussion on how best to support and enhance young people's psychosocial development, this is an issue that needs to be more explicitly articulated and discussed within the school context itself. After all "it is not knowledge or information but self-realization which is the goal. To possess all the world of knowledge and lose one's own self is an awful fate..." (after J. Dewey, 1902/1956).

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Study 1

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Self-concept and questions of life: identity development during late adolescence

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The purpose of the present study was to explore identity development in late adolescent (18–20) years. Three areas were examined: (a) self-concept, (b) existential questions; content and communication patterns, and (c), connections between (a) and (b). The population consisted of 44 Swedish college students. Three methods were used: a questionnaire, the writing of a short essay and a self-evaluation test, Structural Analysis of Social Behavior (SASB). The results demonstrated a positive and stable self-concept for the majority of the group, and that questions of life mainly concerned questions of future. The quality of the self-concept (positive *vs.* negative) was significantly related to how subjects experienced adults' interest in their existential questions. Several issues are discussed: the importance of the social environment for identity development not only during early childhood but also during adolescence, the use of the SASB method in this age group and the need for placing processes of integration into focus in research concerning late adolescence.

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Introduction

Identity is an elusive, yet indispensible concept whenever developmental issues in the adolescent stage are discussed. Identity formation may be regarded as a process of linking parts together. Internal images and feelings that the individual possesses about her/himself are gradually united and perceived as a functioning whole. This whole may differ at various times and places, but will still be experienced as a coherent and stable internal core once the identity has reached a certain level of maturity. However, this linking process is not merely an intrapsychic one, identity may also be described as *the relationship between core and context*, always intrinsically related to development (Bosma *et al.*, 1994). To seek and to find these links is one of the key developmental features of the adolescent stage and also the point of interest in this article.

The overall purpose of the present study is two-fold. First, to study the characteristics of the self-concept during late adolescence, and second, to explore and describe the domain of existential questions and thoughts that often arise within the individual during this developmental period. (The terms existential questions, questions of life and theories of life will be used interchangeably throughout this article.) The approach is psychodynamic and emphasizes the interactional aspect of identity formation similar to theoretical proposals by Erikson (1968), Kroger (1989) and Bosma *et al.* (1994).

Five central concepts will be discussed and placed within the context of the present study: identity formation, identity, self-concept, introject and existential questions. In

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addition, a theoretical identity-model (Ramström, 1991) will be described together with the theoretical basis of the personality inventory (Structural Analysis of Social Behavior, SASB, Benjamin, 1974) used in this study.

Identity formation during adolescence differs from identity formation during previous developmental periods, mainly because the adolescent is experiencing a growing awareness of her/his own identity. This ability is closely linked to the capacity of metathinking, where reality and possibility now can be differentiated from each other (Flavell, 1977). That is, the adolescent is not only able to reflect on her/his identity, but also on an infinite number of *possible* identities. These pictures will then either be disregarded or consolidated with each other and gradually form the identity, described by Rangell (Bosma *et al.*, 1994, p. 27) as "a person's sense of self . . . a conceptualization of the self" which also includes "an evaluation of his or her characteristic behavior". Thus, identity has a qualitative aspect; a feeling is always tied to the concept.

Erikson (1956) includes two aspects in the concept of identity; the personal identity and the ego identity. The first refers to a sense of self-sameness and continuity in time coupled to the perception that also others recognize one's sameness and continuity. The second is related to "developing a defined ego within a social reality" (Erikson, 1959, p. 22). Lichenstein (1977) makes a similar distinction between two related dimensions of the identity; separatedness and relatedness. Here, the healthy identity is on a par with the ability to keep a balance between these two pools. That is, between total loss of identity (i.e. a return to the symbiotic stage) or total isolation. Ramström (1991) elaborates on these ideas, and makes the distinction between the aspects of individuation and integration. The first refers to the individual's questions whether (s)he is separated from other people and whether s(he) is the same person at different times and in different places (cf., Erikson's (1959) personal identity). The latter may be further divided into two part aspects; a social and an existential. Here, inner questions concern social functions and roles, ways of relating to others, as well as ways of relating to social and cultural value systems and beliefs (cf., Erikson's (1959) ego identity; the ideological and interpersonal domains usually connected to Marcia's (1966) identity status paradigm). This identity model also implies a dimension of time where questions of individuation are emphasized during the early development and questions of integration during the later stages. That is, developing an identity first involves a process of separation with the result that the individual is able to see her/himself as a unique person, consistent both in time and space. This constitutes a necessary condition for an integration into the adult world. Much recent identity research emanating from Marcia's (1966) identity status paradigm focuses on the exploratory nature of identity formation (Grotevant and Cooper, 1986). Applied to Ramström's identity model, exploration (and commitments) are found within both aspects but gradually become more conscious and frequent as the individual moves from the theme of individuation to the theme of integration. However, it is important to stress that the model does not imply a strictly sequential relation between these two themes. Instead, the relation between individuation and integration should be described as interactional, where one of the two aspects at time is more dominant than the other (this also makes further comparisons with the identity status paradigm unsuitable).

In conclusion, a more specific aim of the present study is to examine the existential part of the integrational aspect from the identity model described above, a field closely related to what Erikson (1968) labels ideological questions.

Identity formation may be seen as a continuous interplay between the psychological interior of the individual and her socio-cultural context (Erikson, 1959; Grotevant and Cooper, 1986). The content and quality of the identity have, according to psychoanalytical and psychodynamic theory (Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1959; Mahler, 1975), their origins in the dialogue between the mother and her child. Here, the first seed of an identity starts to grow and the outcome is to a large extent dependent on the quality of this dialogue (Mahler, 1975). That is, the mother's ability to mirror and confirm her child together with the child's ability to perceive and respond to this constitute the root of identity. Thus, identity may also be described as the outcome of introjected relations with significant others (Benjamin, 1974), which is the theoretical basis of the personality inventory, Structural Analysis of Social Behavior (SASB) (Benjamin, 1974) used in this study .

Interpersonal theory (Benjamin, 1974; Henry *et al.*, 1990) mainly uses two terms related to identity; self-concept and "introject". Introject is an operationalization used in connection with the SASB inventory and defined as: "a hypothesized personality structure . . . which comprises a relatively stable conscious and unconscious repertoire of ways of treating the self" (Henry *et al.*, 1990, p.769). This "treatment repertoire" is, according to the theory, mirroring the treatment received by early significant others and can be described in terms of self-love and inner control. According to interpersonal theory (Benjamin, 1974), early experience is critical. However, formation and content of the self-concept is also assumed to be subjected to development and change across the lifespan (Henry *et al.*, 1990), an opinion shared by, for instance, Grotevant (1986).

The SASB model employs two dimensions; affiliation/disaffiliation and independence/interdependence, both applicable to the adolescent stage where questions of autonomy and control over oneself and one's life are central issues. The two dimensions are applied both to the introject and to the individual's interpersonal behaviour patterns. These are closely linked to each other; "introjective actions or states are major correlates of affective experience and are important in shaping interpersonal behavior" (Henry *et al.*, 1990, p. 769). In the present study the SASB inventory is limited to the introject part, and interpersonal behaviour is instead studied by means of a questionnaire. The reason for this is that focus in this study is directed towards subjects' communication patterns on a few specific issues with her/his overall social environment, rather than the quality of relation to one specific person.

In conclusion, we find that the terms self-concept and introject used within interpersonal theory may be linked to the terms identity and identity formation in the same sense that they have been described above. In the following, identity will be used in the theoretical discussion, self-concept in relation to empirical findings and introject in direct relation to the SASB inventory.

Existential questions is another concept that, like identity, is hard to define. Things considered important by one person may be of less significance or even irrelevant to others. However, although the variations to a large extent may be individual, group variations with respect to age also occur. The second aim of the present study is to examine what may be considered the principal elements of existential questions during late adolescence. In addition, patterns of communication will be examined; how often and with whom does the adolescent discuss these issues? To find oneself in terms of an existential context may be considered as one of the last building blocks of an adult identity. One essential factor here is the presence of adult people who are able to convey ideological messages to the adolescent and who are willing to act as partners in a dialogue that concerns these issues. That is, the process is much dependent on the social environment of the adolescent. Results from a

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previous study (Adamson, 1993) revealed that contacts with adults other than parents and older siblings were scarce and that many adolescents explicitly expressed a wish for increased contacts with adults. The adolescents also expressed a dissatisfaction with the way the Swedish school system treated topics of existential nature. Existential anxiety and feelings of loneliness with respect to questions and theories of life were common (see also Swedish National Board of Education, 1969, 1981; Åkerberg, 1987). In addition, indications of a relationship between the quality of the self-concept *vs.* the possibility to verbalize and process questions and theories of life in interaction with others were found. The third and final purpose of this study is to further examine these indications.

In sum the present article will focus on the following topics: (a) self-concept during late adolescence, in terms of positive/negative, affiliation/disaffiliation and independence/interdependence, (b) existential questions, content and patterns of communication with others, and (c) possible connections between (a) and (b).

Method

Subjects

Fifty-three college students from a small-town college in the south of Sweden were asked to participate in the study. To obtain a representative distribution with respect to socio-economic factors, subjects were evenly drawn both from classes aiming towards further education (FE) and from vocational classes (V). The subjects participated in the study on two separate occasions. Response rate on the first occasion was 92·5% and on the second 90·7%. This left 44 subjects (19 females and 25 males) who participated in the study. The subjects' mean age was 18·5 (S.D. 0·59). Average school grade was 3·2 (S.D. 0·50) on a scale of 1–5 where 5 represents the top grade.

Materials

Structural Analysis of Social Behavior (SASB). SASB is a method for evaluating the individual's internalized self-concept (i.e. the introject) and interpersonal behaviour (Benjamin, 1974). The model consists of three interrelated circumplex surfaces in a two-dimensional space; affiliation/disaffiliation, and independence/interdependence. Each surface defines a particular perspective or focus of interpersonal transactions. Surface 1 includes focus on another person and Surface 2 involves focus on the self. The third surface focuses on the introject. That is, the outcome of intrapsychic actions when focus on the other (Surface 1) is directed inward on the self. In the present study Questionnaire A has been used, which corresponds to Surface 3. The questionnaire comprises 36 items where self-ratings are made on a 0–100 scale according to the degree the individual judges an item to be descriptive of her/his behaviour. Figure 1 presents a simplified version of the SASB model in which the 36 items are collapsed into eight clusters. For a more detailed description of the SASB system, the reader should consult Benjamin (1974), and Armelius *et al.* (1983) and Armelius and Stiwne (1986) for the Swedish version used in the present study.

The ratings are scored by means of a computer programme and the result for each subject is presented as eight cluster-values (Figure 1) and four coefficients. Each coefficient represents a central tendency that summarizes the overall introjective stance of the individual. The first coefficient, termed the *attack coefficient*, expresses the respondent's

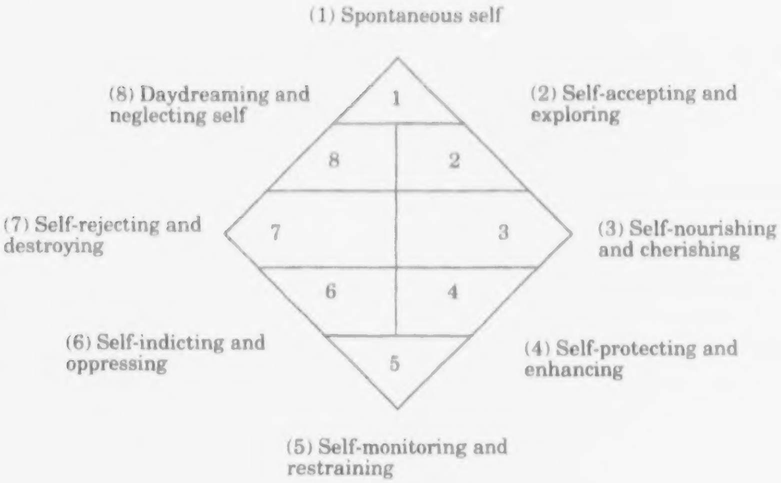
(1) Spontaneous self
(8) Daydreaming and neglecting self
(2) Self-accepting and exploring
1
8
2
(7) Self-rejecting and destroying
7
3
(3) Self-nourishing and cherishing
6
4
(6) Self-indicting and oppressing
5
(4) Self-protecting and enhancing
(5) Self-monitoring and restraining

Figure 1. The SASB System. Cluster version of the introject.

rating on the horizontal axis, affiliation/disaffiliation. This is interpreted as self-love *vs.* self-hate when applied to the introject. The second coefficient, the *control coefficient*, expresses the central tendency of the ratings on the vertical axis, that is, the dimension of independence/interdependence. This is interpreted as spontaneity *vs.* self-control when focus is on the introject. The *conflict coefficient* expresses inner conflicts and shows whether there are high ratings on both sides of the two dimensions. Finally, the *consistency coefficient*, expresses whether the ratings are consistent or not, that is whether the introject is stable or not. The interpretation of the coefficients are summarized in Table 1.

Values are expressed in the range from −1·00 to +1·00 and scored as follows: values >±0·71 are described as "high", ±0·71–±0·40 as "relatively high" and values in the interval ±0·40–±0·20 as "tendency to".

Test–retest reliability for the American version of SASB is r=0·87 for adults (Benjamin, 1984). Regarding construct validity, factor analysis shows that 75% of the total variance in cluster ratings can be explained by three factors. This applies both to the American version and the Swedish translation (Armelius and Öhman, 1990). These results also refer to adults.

In the present study, two mean values have also been computed from six of the eight cluster values; "Positive Self Concepts Clusters" (SASB PSCC) and "Negative Self Concept Clusters" (SASB NSCC). The first was obtained by using the scores from clusters

Table 1 *Interpretations of the four SASB coefficients with focus on the introject*

Coefficient	Positive coefficient	Negative coefficient
Attack	Self-hate	Self-love
Control	Self-control	Spontaneity
Conflict	Self-control/spontaneity	Self-love/self-hate
Consistency	Stable	Ratings near zero or negative; introject is diffuse/chaotic

2, 3 and 4 (see Figure 1) where high scores express a positive self-concept. The second contains the scores from clusters 6, 7 and 8 (see Figure 1). High scores here express a negative self-concept. Clusters 1 and 5 were not included as they solely measure independence/interdependence, a dimension we did not consider meaningful to value as positive or negative in this context.

Essay. The subjects were asked to write a short essay on a given topic which was labelled "My Questions of Life". The purpose was to collect explorative information for a questionnaire. The essays were analysed in order to find out what questions were in general recognized as "important questions of life". This was simply done by reading all essays and listing each new issue that was mentioned. A total number of 167 issues were found and sorted into eight categories: thoughts about death, future, life, God, "myself", global issues (e.g. war, environmental topics and pollution), relational issues (e.g. boy- and girlfriends, parents) and, finally, one category for miscellaneous items.

Questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to explore eight different areas: (a) adult contacts, (b) ways of relating to one's future, (c) aims of life, (d) existential questions, (e) suicide, (f) religious/ideological beliefs, (g) self-concept, and (h) communication with others concerning existential topics.

The questionnaire consisted of 46 items where the answers were scored on nominal scales or interval scales. All mean values, standard deviations and correlation coefficients presented in this article are computed from questions scored on interval scales, values ranging from 1–5 (=25 questions). The coding procedure to alternative answers to these questions is presented in the following (Table 2 may be of help to the reader).

Three questions (Q16, 26 and 41) were formulated as statements (e.g. Q16 "I feel certain that one day I will be able to realize most of my future plans") where 5 represents *fully agree*. Q15, 18, 22, 29, 42, 43, 44 and 45 all give high scores for answers meaning "a lot of" (i.e. Q15 "looking forward a lot", Q16 "high ability" etc.).

Fifteen questions were used to create four clusters. Cluster 1 (Q6–8) and 2 (Q9–11) concerned relations with the mother and father, respectively, high values representing a good relationship. Cluster 3 (containing Q13, 17, 20 and 28 all starting "Do you ever think about . . .) centres around existential questions and how much time subjects spend thinking about these issues. Cluster 4 (containing Q31, 33, 35, 37 and 39 all starting "Do you ever talk to somebody about . . .) explores how much and with whom subjects communicate about these existential questions. For both these clusters, 5 represents the answer "yes very often". Finally, Q30, which was used as one of the three self-concept variables, was formulated "Do you feel satisfied and at ease with yourself?" where 5 represents high satisfaction.

Procedure

Both groups, V and FE, were asked to participate after they had had a brief information about the purpose of the study ("youth and existential questions").

The study was carried out on two separate occasions. On the first, subjects were asked to write the essay and to fill in the SASB form. All subjects had been informed about the title of the essay the preceding day and instructed to reflect on the topic until the following day. The subjects were given instructions for 10 minutes and were allowed 70 minutes for writing. They were allowed to leave the classroom after 65 minutes at the earliest. The second occasion took place 1 month later. Here, the subjects were asked to fill in the questionnaire and were given 50 minutes for task-completion. Subjects were instructed not to talk to each other during test sessions.

Results and discussion

The results will be presented and discussed in three parts: first, the data concerning the self-concept, second, existential questions and, finally, self-concept *vs.* patterns of communication on existential thoughts. All values refer to the total group of 44 unless otherwise stated. An analysis of sex differences on the three self-concept measures and the four SASB coefficients was performed by means of an ANOVA. No significant differences were obtained.

Self-concept

The majority of the group expressed a positive self-concept; this applies both to the results from the SASB personality inventory (attack coefficient M=–0·69, S.D.=0·35), and to the questionnaire where subjects were asked to what extent they felt satisfied and at ease with themselves (Q30 M=3·8, S.D.=0·83).

For the SASB consistency-coefficient, 75% showed values higher than 0·71 (M=0·73, S.D.=0·40), indicating that three quarters of the group expressed a stable self-concept. Self-control, on the other hand, was low compared to a group of Swedish university students (M age=25 years, SASB control coefficient M=0·32 *vs.* M=0·51, Armelius and Stiwne, 1986). The SASB conflict coefficient revealed inner conflicts to be more frequent on the dimension of independence/interdependence (75%>0·20, 29%>0·40), rather than on the dimension of affiliation/disaffiliation (10%>–0·20, 0%>–0·40). The results from these two coefficients may be interpreted as an indication of age related factors. First, self-control may be a variable that becomes stronger with increasing age. Second, the question of independence/interdependence is a current issue during this developmental stage and may therefore be a conflict burdened area as opposed to the question of self-love and self-hate which may be determined at an earlier stage.

A group of 10 subjects demonstrated a significantly more unstable self-concept (SASB consistency coefficient M=0·05, S.D.=0·21) compared to the rest of the group (M=0·93, S.D.=0·09, $t(42)=19{\cdot}38$, $p<0{\cdot}001$), and was, for that reason, further examined. The result proved that this group also had a significantly lower mean value on the SASB attack coefficient (M=–0·23, S.D.=0·48) than the rest of the group (M=–0·83, S.D.=0·12, $t(42)=-6{\cdot}8$, $p<0{\cdot}001$), thus indicating a low level of self-love. This is further confirmed in their answers to the questionnaire where the majority of the ten expressed dissatisfaction with themselves (Q30 M=2·9, S.D.=0·88), and their high values on the SASB NSCC (M=39·07, S.D.=6·28) as compared to the score of the rest of the subjects (M=20·83, S.D.=10·51, $t(42)=-5{\cdot}19$, $p<0{\cdot}0001$). Another finding was that this group included all subjects (7%) who had stated that they had attempted to commit suicide. In addition, they were significantly more mentally occupied with the thought of suicide (Q22 M=1·45, S.D.=0·71) than were the rest of the subjects (M=2·2, S.D.=1·03, $t(41)=-2{\cdot}6$, $p<0{\cdot}01$). Thus, an unstable self-concept at this developmental stage does seem to indicate several factors of a negative nature and may be a field for special attention.

Table 2 presents correlations between self-concept (in SASB-terms; PSCC and NSCC and scores on Q30, all significantly intercorrelated, see Table 3) and observed measures on four groups of variables from the questionnaire; parental relationships, outlook on self and life, existential issues and, finally, thoughts of suicide.

The three measurements of self-concept displayed the same patterns with one exception; the SASB PSCC exhibited a slight tendency of irregularity.

The first area in Table 2 (parental relationships) shows that relationships with both the mother and father correlate significantly with the self-concept. In the second area, outlook

Table 2 *Correlations between self-concept vs. parental relationships, outlook on self and life, existential issues and suicide*

Questionnaire	Self-concept		
	Q30 (*r*)	SASB PSCC (*r*)	SASB NSCC (*r*)
Parental relationships			
C1 Quality of the relationship with mother	0·477***	0·239	−0·504***
C2 Quality of the relationship with father	0·383**	0·231*	−0·444***
Outlook on self and life			
Q16 Ability to realize one's future plans	0·561***	0·325**	−0·331**
Q18 Man's ability to influence his life in general	0·551***	0·412**	−0·440***
Q26 Belonging in a "life context"	0·471***	0·013	−0·247*
Q29 Feelings of similarity to other people	0·298*	0·113	−0·262*
Q15 Looking forward to entering the adult world	0·349**	0·263*	−0·284*
Existential issues			
C3 Amount of existential thoughts	−0·370**	−0·224	0·465***
C4 Amount of communication—existential thoughts	0·316*	0·120	0·011
Q41 Experienced loneliness—existential thoughts	0·474***	0·081	−0·418**
Q45 Experienced interest from adults—existential issues	0·401**	0·377**	−0·355**
Q42 Existential issues—school work	0·284*	0·291*	−0·111
Suicide			
Q22 Suicidal thoughts	−0·420**	−0·153	0·515***

*$p<0·05$; **$p<0·01$; ***$p<0·001$.

Table 3 *Correlations between three self-concept measures; Q30, SASB PSCC and SASB NSCC*

	Q30	SASB PSCC	SASB NSCC
Q30	1	0·435***	−0·707***
SASB PSCC	0·435***	1	−0·499***
SASB NSCC	−0·707***	0·499***	1

*$p<0·05$; **$p<0·01$; ***$p<0·001$.

on self and life, a positive self-concept was significantly correlated to the belief that one is able to realize one's future plans and that human beings can form their lives rather than just being simple victims of fate. Also, a positive self-concept was related to a sense of looking forward to entering the adult world as opposed to a negative self-concept which was connected to anxiety regarding the future and the feeling that adults do not fully accept young people's entry into the adult world. The feeling that one belonged in a life context was also significantly correlated to a positive self-concept.

In sum, a positive self-concept gives the impression of being well-connected both to other people and to life in general, simultaneously a sense of autonomy exists together with a belief in one's own resources and abilities. In other words, the positive self-concept displays "a balance between self and other" (Kroger, 1989) as opposed to the negative self-concept where disconnectedness, lack of control and anxiety about the future are the prominent characteristics.

Existential questions

The second area in this study examined the domain of existential questions. The results here will be presented in three parts. First, what do adolescents refer to as important existential issues that they often think about (i.e. content)? Second, do they talk to somebody about these things and with whom (i.e. patterns of communication)? Finally, the results of the questions concerning suicide will be presented.

Content. Results from both the essay and the questionnaire revealed that questions of life mainly included questions of future (Q13 M=4·0, S.D.=0·70). Reflections on the meaning of life on a more general level was also a common topic (Q17 M=3·0, S.D.=0·88), whereas death and the question "who am I?" displayed lower ratings (Q20 M=2·8, S.D.=0·82 and Q28 M=2·2, S.D.=1·0, respectively). The fact that the last question "who am I?" was less frequently asked may be interpreted as supporting theories which state that the ambivalent self-concept of high-adolescence at this point has melted together into a more integrated and well-functioning whole (Blos, 1962). Instead, the present need appears to relate to the integration of oneself into a context. That is, rather than just trying out images of oneself, one is now trying out images of oneself in the future.

The questionnaire also included questions about religious beliefs and theories of life. A third of the total number of subjects stated that they believe in God or in some other kind of divine or higher existence. When subjects were asked if they belonged to any specific religious church/organisation 20% stated that they did. About half of the subjects stated that they felt as if they were belonging in a life context. Three groups, (a) "believe in God or some other kind of divine/higher existence", (b) "do not believe in God or some other kind of divine/higher existence" and (c) "do not know" were tested with an ANOVA. The result was that group (a) also felt more belonging in a life context than others ($M(a)=3{\cdot}75$, $M(b)=2{\cdot}82$, $M(c)=3{\cdot}29$, $F(44)=4{\cdot}16$, $p=0{\cdot}0226$), a variable that was also correlated with ratings of a positive self-concept ($r=0{\cdot}471$, $p<0{\cdot}001$). Thus, having a belief, not necessarily a specific religion, is connected with a positive self-concept. The fact that a group of subjects who stated that they felt a certain (34%) or great (7%) need of finding something to believe in showed a more negative self-concept supports this interpretation. These results further support the idea that the formation of a personal belief may be seen as a promoting factor in the process of developing an identity and as an essential part of adolescence (Erikson, 1959).

Group (b) revealed a significantly lower level of self-control ($M(a)=0{\cdot}52$, $M(b)=0{\cdot}08$, $M(c)=0{\cdot}28$, $F(42)=3{\cdot}74$, $p=0{\cdot}0323$) and also experienced less inner conflict regarding the two dimensions of the SASB than the other two groups ($M(a)=0{\cdot}33$, $M(b)=0{\cdot}06$, $M(c)=0{\cdot}32$, $F(42)=3{\cdot}73$, $p=0{\cdot}0326$). That is, these individuals are close to cluster one of the SASB model (Figure 1), "Spontaneous Self" than groups (a) and (c). Inner conflict was earlier proved mainly to concern the dimension of spontaneity/self-control in this age group. A lack of this conflict in combination with low inner control could be an indication of an immature identity. In view of this, the nonbelieving group may consist of more individuals at an earlier developmental stage than the other two groups.

Patterns of communication. As can be seen in Table 4, questions about one's future is the most frequent topic discussed with others. These figures also verify the results of the preceding section; questions of life are really questions of future at this developmental stage. In addition, the order of the topics of Cluster 4 is the same as in Cluster 3 (this cluster did not include religious beliefs and theories of life), and all mean values are higher in Cluster 3 than in Cluster 4 (i.e. subjects spend more time thinking than talking about existential issues). Two things are worth noticing concerning the choice of discussion partner. First, all five topics are readily discussed with mates, whereas parents are mainly chosen when the topics concern the future and the meaning of life in general. Second, the figures for the alternative Other Adult is remarkably low, which evokes the question whether this really is a choice or rather a matter of availability. This seems the more pertinent to ask after examining questions 42–45; Q43 revealed that subjects in general wanted more time for existential topics in school (M=3·4, S.D.=0·84), but not necessarily at home (Q44 M=3·0, S.D.=0·68). Q42 showed that the Swedish school did not help subjects with their existential questions (M=2·3, S.D.=0·83) and, finally, adults' interest in young people's existential questions was perceived as low (Q45 M=2·9, S.D.=1·1).

Suicide. On the question whether they had ever thought of trying to commit suicide, none of the subjects answered "yes, very often", 5% "yes, rather often", 9% "it happens now and again", 30% "it has happened once" and, finally, 56% answered "never". That is, 44%

Table 4 *Communication with others about existential topics (Cluster 4)*

"Do you ever talk to somebody about . . ."			"If you do, with whom do you usually talk?" Discussion partner %			
Topic	M	S.D.	Parent	Mate	Other adult	Never talk
Q31 Your future	3·2	0·93	44	47	9	0
Q33 The meaning of life in general	2·1	0·91	38	30	5	27
Q35 Death	2·0	0·127	16	45	5	34
Q37 Religious beliefs/ theories of life	1·9	0·91	16	41	5	38
Q39 Yourself as a person	1·8	0·86	11	32	9	48

answered that they have had thoughts of committing suicide. Drawing the conclusion that all of these are suffering from high anxiety or deep depressions does not seem plausible considering the overall positive self-concept expressed by the majority of the group. Such a conclusion may also be rejected due to the results from the correlation studies (see Table 2). A connection between the self-concept measured by Q30 and SASB NSCC on the one hand, and scores on how frequent thoughts of committing suicide were on the other, was in fact revealed, but the SASB PSCC did not follow the same pattern. A self-concept characterised by "self-accepting and exploring, self-nourishing and cherishing and self-protecting and enhancing", did not automatically generate low scores on how often one touched upon the idea of suicide. Instead, a possible explanation to the high ratings may be that suicide as a problem-solving strategy frequently is used in this age group as a reflection of an overall black–white/either–or way of functioning. This may gradually be disregarded as new and more mature ways of dealing with problems and crises in life are found.

The second question concerning the topic of suicide showed that 93% never had tried to commit suicide and that 7% had tried. As previously mentioned, all subjects who had tried to commit suicide exhibited a very unstable self-concept.

Self-concept vs. *communication on existential thoughts*

The third and last area this study intended to explore was the assumption that the quality of the self-concept and the possibility to verbalize questions and theories of life in interaction with others are related to each other.

The ratings of the self-concept measured by SASB and Q30, respectively, showed slightly different patterns (Table 2). A positive self-concept (in terms of high ratings on Q30) was significantly related to a higher amount of communication with others than a negative self-concept (r=0·316, p<0·01). These results support our hypotheses and are also in line with previous findings (Adamson, 1993). This was not the case when scores from the SASB PSCC (r=0·120, n.s.) and the SASB NSCC were used (r=0·011, n.s.). However, all three self-concept measures were each significantly related to the experienced interest from adults. That is, a positive self-concept was strongly connected to subjects believing adults to be genuinely interested in their existential questions. Also, an indirect line between the self-concept and "wishes for opportunities of communication" existed. Subjects who stated that they felt lonely facing their existential thoughts and questions (significantly related to a negative self-concept, see Table 2), very seldom expressed the wish for more opportunities to talk to someone about these things. The same subjects also frequently stated that adults did not seem to be interested in sharing their thoughts on these topics. Subjects who, on the other hand, did not feel lonely facing their existential thoughts and questions (significantly related to a positive self-concept, see Table 2) often expressed that they wanted more time for these issues together with adults. They also expressed a strong belief that adults were interested in sharing these thoughts with them. A possible interpretation of these findings is that the first group's disinterest in verbalizing their thoughts may be a sign of resignation caused by the experience that "no one is very interested anyway". This indicates that adults' interest and response towards the adolescent's existential questions is an important factor in identity development. Further support for this assumption is the group who scored low on the SASB coefficient of consistency mentioned previously. In this group eight out of ten subjects stated that they never talk to anyone about their existential questions, seven also stated that they do not think that adults are interested in these questions.

Conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to examine the quality of the self-concept during late adolescence, existential questions during this developmental stage and the possible interaction between the quality of the self-concept and how individuals handled their existential questions. The conclusions will be related to these points together with some comments on the SASB method and the previously described identity model.

The results from the study demonstrate that a majority of the subjects exhibited a positive and stable self-concept. This was related to a number of positive factors all indicating a well-balanced state of "autonomy-relatedness" (Murphey *et al.*, 1963). Ten subjects displayed a significantly unstable self-concept. This was closely linked to negative features such as low self-love, lack of belief in adults' interest in young people's existential questions, suicide attempts and mental preoccupation with thoughts of suicide. However, the thought of suicide was also frequent amongst those who exhibited a positive self-concept. A closer investigation of groups with unstable self-concepts (in terms of SASB) may provide additional information for distinguishing adolescents who actually run the risk of carrying out their suicidal plans and those who do not. The results here are also interesting from a methodological aspect. The SASB method has, previously, mainly been used in clinical settings for adults and not for groups of this size and age. However, we find that the two dimensions the method is based on (affiliation/disaffiliation and independence/interdependence) are meaningful for this age group. Apart from the results concerning the coefficient of consistency, the coefficients of conflict and control also generated some interesting findings in relation to the field of ideological commitments. In addition, the conceptual framework of SASB is compatible with psychodynamic theories and fits well with the Eriksonian paradigm.

The embryo of the individuation–integration model (Ramström, 1991) is found in Erikson's (1956) division of a personal identity and an ego identity. The distinction between individuation/separation and integration introduces a dimension of time where integrational issues are related to the later parts of the adolescent stage. This was confirmed in the present study, where questions of life very clearly included questions of future for the majority of the subjects. That is, the issue of integrating an already individuated identity into the adult world was far more common than dealings with issues of separation and definitions of oneself with respect to (for example) continuity in space and time. We find that the model is useful in two aspects. First, the division of the identity concept into these two main aspects brings clarity to the fact that adolescence is a long developmental period involving fundamentally different processes at different times. Second, by focusing on separation *vs.* integration, *process* rather than *status* is emphasized. Most empirical research on identity formation during late adolescence rooted in the Eriksonian tradition does focus on the social and existential (i.e. integrational) aspects. However, this is often done in a descriptive way where the quality of the self-concept is defined within, for instance, Marcia's identity status paradigm (Marcia, 1966). The application of a more process-oriented model would facilitate the investigation of factors (both within and outside of the individual) promoting or obstructing the identity formation. Thus, we find that *the processes of integration* may be seen as the main issue of late adolescence and a field in need of further exploration.

In this study, two circumstances provide further evidence to the relevance of an interactional and process-oriented model of identity formation: (a) the fact that our original assumption about the relationship between the self-concept and communication patterns concerning existential issues (Adamson, 1993) received support, and (b) the fact that a connection between the self-concept and the belief/disbelief in adults' interest and willingness to participate in a dialogue with the adolescent about her/his existential questions and thoughts was discovered.

Grotevant and Cooper (1986) proposes that *exploration in a context of connectedness* is one promoting factor to identity development in adolescence. Their discussion refers to interactions and relational experience within the family. However, the results of their studies may also be of use as an entrance to research on adolescent–adult interactions other than the one between adolescent and parent. That is, making possible an analysis not only of the good-enough parent but also of the good-enough environment, as Blos (1979) suggested. In this article the social environment and adolescent–adult interactions have mainly been discussed in relation to school and particularly the way existential issues are treated at college level. The results here revealed that many adolescents find that the time and attention existential topics receive in the Swedish school system is highly insufficient and that adults in general are experienced as uninterested in young people's existential thoughts. Thus, an imbalance between intellectual/cognitive development and development concerning personal/emotional issues exists. These are facts that should be highlighted in educational/curriculum discussions and we propose three ways necessary for improving these conditions. First, an increased level of the teachers' knowledge in developmental–psychological issues. This would yield an increased awareness with respect to the role of the educational system in relation to identity formation during this developmental stage. Second, improvements with respect to the teacher's possibilities of personal development which would increase their ability to meet young people's questions and interests (Upson, 1991), and third, further development of educational and didactic methods relevant to existential topics.

Finally, we find that this study provides enough indications (although no causal connections can be stated) to suggest a model positing bidirectional influences between adolescent identity development and the quality of adolescent–adult interactions concerning existential issues. We also consider these findings to be the most interesting in this study and a domain worth further investigation.

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Study II

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Adolescent identity—a qualitative approach: Self-concept, existential questions and adult contacts

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In-depth interviews were performed with 12 adolescents (Swedish students, 16–19 years). Three questions were probed; what do adolescents say on the subjects of (a) themselves, (b) their existential questions, and (c) their adult contacts. The first two questions were aimed at elucidating the process of identity development, the last one at factors that may be influencing this process.

The results showed that (a) balancing and controlling one's own needs and wishes in relation to others' was a central issue, (b) existential questions mainly concerned the personal future, (c) adult contacts outside the family were scarce and (d) all respondents expressed a need for adult contacts as sources of knowledge and experience.

The conclusions are that identity formation during late adolescence consists of integrative issues where adults play a specific and important role.

Key words: Identity, adolescence, self-concept, existential questions, adult contacts, interviews.

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Theories of understanding the self can be organized around two major themes; self as *subject vs. object* (James, 1890; Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934) and self in *relation to others* (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). These two themes do not stand in opposition to each other, they are simply addressed with different emphasis by different scholars. In contemporary research and theorizing on identity development there is a strong focus on self in *relation to others*. However, implicit in these theories lies the notion that self as *subject vs. object* carries a specific implication during the adolescent stage. Cognitive abilities now make it possible to direct the attention of "self as a subject" towards "self as an object" also on a metacognitive level. That is, the adolescent period involves conscious reflections on issues related to one's identity scarcely found in younger individuals. The major goal of this study was to examine the subject of identity development during late adolescence through the adolescents' own reflections on themselves and themselves in relation to others.

Our theoretical background is contemporary identity theory rooted in the Eriksonian paradigm. The key concepts here have moved from Erikson's (1959) emphasis on the *identity crisis*, to Marcia's (1966) extensive work on *identity exploration and commitment* (resulting in the identity status theory), to Grotevant (and others) stressing the importance of understanding the *processes* involved in these explorations and commitments (Grotevant, 1986). Here, the narrative approach is gradually gaining interest, viewing development rather as a change in the individual's structure of meaning making, than in terms of progress (Widdershoven, 1994). However, a central core in Erikson's seminal work has remained the same throughout the decades, the idea of identity as the intersection of the individual and society. That is, identity formation is viewed as a reciprocal process between the psychological interior of the individual and her/his socio-cultural environment (Erikson, 1968; Bosma *et al.*, 1994). In addition to this, we suggest that a person's existential questions are intrinsically linked to her/his identity and thus may be viewed as reflections of the identity formation process. Consequently, we propose that by exploring the adolescent's thoughts and reflections on this subject, it is possible to tap some of the aspects of the complex process of identity development that have not been elucidated in previous research. However, this proposition requires that the respondents be given freedom of choice regarding the topics to be discussed. Hence, the choice of a qualitative approach where the common denominator is to confront empirical reality from the perspective of those being studied (Campbell, 1988). That is, an *inductive* rather than *deductive* method was used when in-depth, unstructured interviews were performed with twelve adolescents.

Identity can be discussed in terms of *structure, process, function* and *result* (Grotevant, 1993). That is, questions can be raised about what an identity is, how it develops, what it is for and also about various qualitative aspects judged by either the individual her-/himself or others. Three sets of questions were probed in the interviews; what is the adolescents' own perspective on the subject matters of (a) themselves, (b) their existential questions, and (c) their adult contacts. The first two questions were aimed at elucidating the actual process of identity development, the last at a factor we believe is influential in this process and thus may affect the outcome. In the following each of the three interview areas will be discussed.

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The initial question of the study relates to adolescent *self-concepts*. This concept needs to be distinguished from the concept of identity. In Erikson's terms, identity is primarily described as a global construct without a distinct definition (Waterman, 1988). However, Harter (1983), highlighted three components; a sense of *unity* among one's self-conceptions, a sense of *continuity* of these attributions over time, and a sense of *mutuality* between the individual's conception of the self and the conceptions held by others (see also Rakoff, 1981). That is, one of the distinct facets of the construct is a sense of temporal-spatial continuity, strongly related to the social environment of the individual. In addition, identity has a dual aspect; that of the person's self experience and that of others' recognition of her. In the empirical context, *self-concept* is often used to study the first part of this dual aspect, defined as the individual's mental representation of herself (Coleman & Hendry, 1990; Bosma *et al.*, 1994). Here, identity will be viewed as a broad theoretical construct where the self-concept is one component. Thus, identity will here be referred to in relation to theoretical discussions, whereas the term self-concept will be used in relation to empirical findings.

The second area of inquiry concerns adolescents' *existential questions*, defined as *a central theme of interest to the individual at the time of inquiry*. That is, existential questions are not pre-defined in terms of their content (e.g. life–death, good–evil etc.). Instead, the importance attached to a particular issue by the individual her-/himself, determines what should be considered her/his existential question(s). This is in line with Hartman (1986) who defined existential questions as (a) referring to questions about the fundamental conditions of human life and existence at large and (b) expressions of the individual's need to process her own experiences and of her experiences in relation to the environment (social and existential). This need emanates from a desire to interpret, understanding and ultimately find a meaning of and purpose in life. In this sense the underlying motivation is similar to what Bourne (1978) listed as one of seven distinct facets of Erikson's ego identity; to find "the existential significance" of one's life (Bourne, 1978; p. 366).

There is little previous research on the subject of adolescents and existential questions from an identity research perspective. Adamson and Lyxell (1996) found that late adolescents rated existential questions in the following order according to importance; questions about the future, the meaning of life in general, death and finally, questions about one's own identity. A domain closely related to existential questions is that of "ideology" in Erikson's works. This has been investigated in relation to Marcia's identity status paradigm in a number of studies (Marcia, 1966; Marcia, 1976; Grotevant & Adams, 1984; Adams *et al.*, 1989; Markstrom-Adams *et al.*, 1994). However, in these studies the domains (e.g. politics, religion and philosophy) were pre-defined to the respondents in contrast to the unstructured approach of the present study.

The final question in the current study concerned adolescents' *contacts with adults*. The term "contact" was chosen as opposed to "relationship", since the aim is to include all types of personal interaction between the adolescent and the adult world, not merely those characterized by emotional closeness. Previous research in this area appears to have focused almost exclusively on relationships within the family. Results here indicate the importance of maintaining emotional closeness to the parents, while simultaneously, developing a psychological independence (Allen *et al.*, 1994; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). In addition, an increased symmetry of influence in the adolescent–parent relation has been claimed to account for substantial parts of individual differences in development during the adolescent period (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). However, moving out of the close family circle, the literature on adolescent–adult contacts is limited. Ramström (1989) claimed, in relation to Schafer's (1968) discussions on identification, that adolescents' integration into the adult world is highly dependent on close contacts with "generative adults" (cf. Erikson's seventh normative crisis; 1959) in addition to the parents. Adamson and Lyxell (1996) found that contacts between late adolescents and adults other than the parents were scarce. Also, communication on existential topics with adults other than the parents was extremely low, and further, the quality of the self-concept (positive vs. negative) was significantly related to how participants experienced adults' interest in their existential questions.

In conclusion, adults other than family, seem to be lacking not only in the literature on adolescents, but also in their lives. This is thus a domain in need of further investigation in relation to identity development. In this last part of the study two questions were asked. The first referred to which adult persons that were included in the respondents' lives, and the second to whether respondents felt the need for adults in their lives.

In sum, the present study focused on adolescents' (a) self-concepts, (b) existential questions and (c) adult contacts. The method consisted of in-depth, unstructured interviews. The analysis was performed with a hermeneutic, inductive perspective with emphatic and interpretative understanding as key concepts (Jensen, 1989; Karlsson, 1993).

METHOD

Pre-understanding reliability and validity in the qualitative paradigm

Two central concepts within the qualitative paradigm are *pre-understanding* and *reflexivity*. The first refers to the researcher's lived understanding of her/his field of interest. The second refers to the process of making pre-understandings explicit and, simultaneously, to acknowledge the central position of the researcher in the construction of knowledge. It can most easily be described as "disciplined self reflection" (Wilkinson, 1988) and occurs in the

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form of a continuous dialogue between the researcher and her/his material (Woods, 1990). In the current study our own pre-understanding primarily consist of four aspects. The first is linked to theory, the second to familiarity with the empirical situation (i.e. previous experience of conversations with adolescents on the same topics as in the study) third, our own empirical results prior to this study and finally, a personal aspect. Questions of identity are at times (we believe) relevant to all individuals. Consequently, exploring the identity questions of others will irrevocably be colored by one's own questions.

Discussions on pre-understanding and reflexivity automatically bring issues of *reliability* and *validity* into focus. These terms differ significantly in meaning in the quantitative and the qualitative paradigm. The quantitative reliability problem is that of measuring in a precise manner and also to ensure the possibility of replication. Since the qualitative approach is not about measurement but discovery, finding new data when repeating a study is contrarily, a sign of good quality, not low reliability. As with reliability, the discussion on validity becomes reversed in comparison to the quantitive approach. There are no hypotheses to test, and subsequently no risk of measuring the wrong thing. Salner (1989) suggested that it would make more sense to talk of *defensible knowledge claims* rather than validity *per se*, an opinion also held by Kvale (1989, 1996). Larson (1993) discussed validity in terms of five criteria; the discourse criteria, heuristic value, empirical anchorage, consistency and a pragmatic criterion. That is, the results should withstand the questioning of other researchers, have rhetorical qualities (e.g. create new metaphors and icons) and be closely tied to the empirical context. The term consistency refers to what is often labelled the heart of hermeneutics; the relationship between the parts and the whole. The pragmatic criterion has to do with the practical value of the study. Finally on the issue of validity, Jensen (1989) proposed that the process of validation is a process of *showing how sense is made*. This implies that the reader has to be brought to the scene and progressively travel with the researcher through the interpretive journey. Consequently, the presentation of a qualitative study must include details from the empirical situation, in this study in the form of quotations from the interviews.

Participants

In a data collection prior to this study, a written enquiry was included as to whether the participants would agree to be interviewed on the topic of themselves. From the original sample of 98 students, 37 students agreed to participate and 12 of these were chosen. Thus, data for this article were based on in-depth interviews with 12 (6 women and 6 men) first and third year students (16/17 and 18/19 years respectively) at a Swedish small-town high school.

Principles of sampling

The procedure for selecting a smaller number of students from the group of 37 who originally agreed to participate was as follows. Two principles for a qualitative sample were used; *dimensional sampling* and *purposive sampling* (Cohen & Manion, 1980). The first involves choosing one or more characteristic(s) of theoretical interest; in the current study age and gender. Hence, the whole group was divided into four groups; Group one: girls, first year (nine students), Group two: boys, first year (ten students), Group three: girls, third year (thirteen students) and Group four: boys, third year (five students). The second principle, purposive sampling, should be based on the investigator's subjective knowledge of the subjects. Here, students' answers on a sentence completion task ("When I reflect upon myself, I think…") were used. These answers were first listed according to content (i.e., each subject could be placed in several groups). Then, three students from each group were chosen, each student covering as many topics as possible. Thus, the final choice represented an even spread across age and gender; three individuals from each group respectively, and also a maximum variety of the answers to the sentence completion task. These students were contacted, informed more specifically about the purpose of the study and again asked if they were interested in participating. All twelve agreed.

Procedure

The interview session took place over a time span of four months during the spring of 1996. Group one and two were doing their second term of college education, Group three and four, their sixth (and last) term. All interviews were performed at the college and by the same person. They were audio taped and later transcribed for analysis in line with Kvale's (1996) notions on this subject.

Ten of the interviews lasted for 45 minutes, one for 35 minutes (Group two) and one student (Group one) was interviewed on two occasions (the first for 45 minutes and the second for 25 minutes).

The interviews were conducted in the form of conversations structured around the three topics; self-concept, existential questions and contacts with adults. The purpose was to penetrate the student's own way of thinking within these three domains. An interview guide, rather than a structured interview questionnaire was used. Four main questions were always asked (and asked in the same order); "Please tell me who you are", "What do you find important in your life right now, what do you often find yourself thinking about?", "Who are the adult persons in your life?" and "Do you think it is important to have adults in your life, and, if so, why?". The interview guide also included other questions in each area, used when/if the interview came to a halt. In other words, the interviewer mainly followed the path laid by the interviewee, aiming towards being "the interested listener" (Holme & Solvang, 1991). Some of the participants were initially anxious about being tape recorded but quickly relaxed once the interview started. A few were also nervous about the questions and had to be reassured that there were no right or wrong answers or "trick" questions. In all, the students had a positive attitude, spoke very freely about themselves, and some even expressed the need for everybody "to sit down and talk about themselves like this".

Methods of analysis

The analysis of the written interview protocols was performed in four steps, using an inductive approach. Step one involved reading each protocol and writing a brief abstract of the contents. This was done in order to "get to know" the respondents individually and is best described as a process of *empathic understanding* (Karlsson, 1993). Next, each protocol was divided into smaller units, organized around our three main areas of interest. These units consisted of quotes and summaries (meaning units) covering an optimal amount of what each participant had communicated within each area. Third, the quotes and meaning units of all twelve protocols were gathered under the three headings self-concept, existential questions and adult contacts. Each heading/part was then analyzed separately, using quotes, meaning units and full protocols in an interactive process, moving from the individual level towards an abstract level, thus discovering/constructing a general structure of the complete material. The process was constantly kept close to the original protocols (cf. Becker, in press; Larson, 1993; Bjurwill, 1993). Finally, during the analysis, certain themes and questions emerged, which elicited new readings of each protocol with these specific themes and questions in mind.

In sum, two modes of understanding (Karlsson, 1993), *empathic* and *interpretive*, were used in four steps, leading from the written word in each protocol to a general structure for each of our three areas of interest. In addition, each protocol was reread and probed

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Table 1. *Twelve part-aspects of THE SELF-CONCEPT with quotation examples*

Respondents described themselves in terms of:

1. *Self-related emotions*:
    - *looks*:
        "My hair is *far* too curly..."
    - *inner qualities*:
        "I have a small drawback maybe, I am rather shy sometimes"
2. *Life-related emotions*:
    "Everything feels *real* good... especially now that I have started high-school..."
3. *Activities*:
    "I do a lot, play the piano and the organ, read a lot... I don't go out very much though..."
4. *Inconsistencies*:
    "...well, no, as I said, I'm probably two persons in one somehow. I swing up and down incredibly..."
5. *Wishes and dreams*:
    "I have always wanted to be white, *always*! Ever since I was little."
6. *Changes and development of oneself*:
    "I dare to talk about things now, I used to keep things to myself, now I have the courage to speak up"
7. *Questions of how one* ***is*** *as a person and how one* ***should*** *be*:
    - *how one should* ***be and behave***
        "well, you have to show consideration, you have to show respect for everyone"
    - *trying to* ***keep a balance*** *between how one is and how one should be*
        "what you think and believe you shouldn't change... but certain things you just can't say, hell breaks loose then, because, like *no one* thinks like I do..."
8. *Interacting with others*:
    "I try to listen, because often there isn't much you can do, but if it helps the other person that I listen to them, I rather like doing that."
9. *Other's impressions of oneself*:
    "I think they (his parents) are proud of me"
10. *If one is similar or not to other people*:
    "Well... I suppose I am pretty much the same as other guys"
11. *Separating oneself from others*:
    "I am like opposite everything, I don't do anything the same way as others... it feels so superficial if every one is the same!"
12. *Making one's own decisions and taking responsibility for oneself*:
    "You learn to take responsibility... otherwise I don't think you can cope in life. You must *dare* to take your own responsibilities and make your own decisions, you just can't trust others all the time."

according to themes and questions that appeared during the analysis.

Copies of tapes and interview protocols can be obtained from the authors (all personal information has been removed).

RESULTS

Findings within each of the three interview areas will be presented separately in the following order; self-concept, existential questions and finally, adult contacts. Each section contains a number of quotations in order to illustrate our lines of thought in the analytic process (cf. Jensen, 1989).

Self-concept

The results in this section proceed from a content analysis at a quotation level, through an interpretive level and finally, arrive at a proposed model of adolescent identity.

Content level analysis. The topics that the respondents talked about when describing themselves varied substantially. However all quotations and meaning units could be gathered into twelve content groups, labelled *part-aspects of the self-concept*. These are presented in Table 1 together with examples from the material.

Two of these (number one and seven; issues of *self-related emotions* and issues related to *how one is as a person vs. how one should be*) were further divided into subgroups and need further comment. First, expressions of self-related emotions were rare and above all, they were seldom the subject of discussion. Instead, they were usually made in the manner of stating facts. In contrast, part-aspect number seven occurred frequently in the majority of the interviews. In fact, although all respondents made an effort to answer the initial question, most of them sooner or later spontaneously touched upon these types of issues. That is, the question *What sort of a person am I*? was transformed into another question; *What sort of a person should I be*? The reflections here often involved an attempt to balance the needs of oneself in relation to others':

> It is important to listen to others... but at the same time, you should be able to stand up for your own ideas... also you should help people, be supportive... I am not very good at that, sometimes I feel like why should I help someone

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Table 2. *SELF-CONCEPT part-aspects arranged in four SELF-CONCEPT dimensions*

Part-aspect	Dimension
	THE EXPERIENCING ME
1. Self-related emotions -looks -inner qualities	
2. Life-related emotions	
3. Activities	
	THE INTROSPECTING ME
4. Inconsistencies	
5. Wishes and dreams	
6. Changes and development of oneself	
7. Questions of how one *is* as a person vs. how one *should* be -how one should be and behave -trying to keep a balance between how one is and how one should be	
	THE RELATING ME
8. Interacting with others	
9. Other's impressions of one-self	
10. If one is similar or not to other people	
	THE AUTONOMY-SEEKING ME
11. Separating oneself from others	
12. Making one's own decisions and taking responsibility over oneself	

> when I don't benefit from it myself, but it's silly to think that way because the other person might feel that he gains a lot... I don't know, I try... but sometimes I'm a bit egotistical... (Madeleine)
>
> ...it's difficult because you should be a kind person, but you can't be too kind and that's really hard... because if you are too kind that's no good... and if you stand up for your own rights too much, then people think you're a negative sort of a person! (Anna)

The respondents emphasized themselves vs. the other somewhat differently in this process. In the two citations above, the centre is on *oneself* in relation to others. One of the respondents however, appeared to think in a reversed manner and put the main emphasis on the other person's needs and feelings:

> No, I don't really think about who I am, well it happens sometimes... I think about how I am towards others. I want to be friends with everyone I meet... I don't want to be unpleasent... and afterwards I often worry that I have said something the other person felt offended by, what if we aren't friends anymore... (Lars)

In conclusion, questions of self-related emotions did not appear to evoke much interest whereas the question of how one should be and behave in relation to others, yet, still be able to express oneself, emerged as an important issue to many of the respondents. This is one of the major findings of this study and will be discussed further below.

The interpretive level analysis (displayed in Table 2) involved a synthesizing of the twelve part-aspects according to their underlying/implicit meaning, which resulted in a further condensation of the material into four *self-concept-dimensions*. These were labelled *the experiencing me*, *the introspecting me*, *the relating me* and finally, *the autonomy-seeking me*.

In addition, these dimensions could be related to two *positions*; *self* or *the other*. That is, the respondents either talked about themselves in relation to themselves (i.e. the experiencing me, and the introspecting me) or about themselves in relation to others (i.e. the relating me and the autonomy-seeking me). Further, these four dimensions and two positions seemed embedded in a *theme*, that of *proximity or distance*, which was visible on two levels. First, *within* the individual in the form of being close to oneself in the experiencing me and further away when introspecting and reflecting upon oneself. Second, *between* oneself and others in the sense of being close when relating to others and further away when seeking autonomy. The results can be summarized in the following model (Fig. 1):

The model serves as an illustration to the empirical material of the current study but will also be discussed in more general terms in the final section.

Existential questions

The analysis of this section contained two parts; first a content analysis of the issues that respondents brought up for discussion. Second, a time-filter was applied to the results of the first part.

Content level analysis. The first question of this part of the interview was: "What do you find important right now and often think about?" By abstracting and compiling quotations and meaning units the material could be grouped into five content areas (see Table 3).

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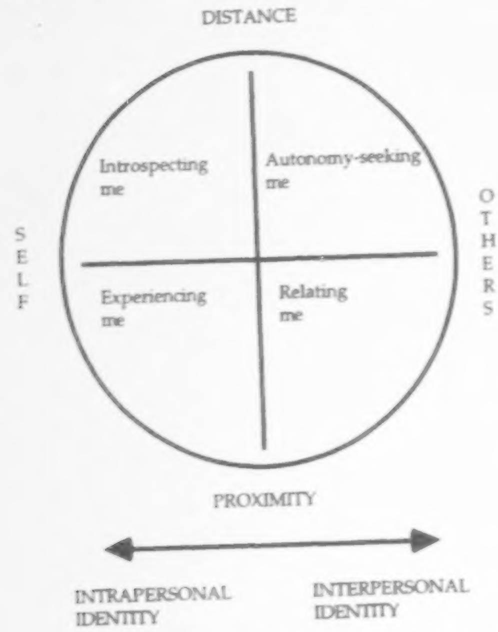

Fig. 1. Late adolescent identity described in the terms of four self-concept dimensions, two positions and one theme.

The first area contained those statements that related to oneself as a person. Carl for instance, is a young man with a history of problems and conflicts having to do with school. What he usually thinks about now is how to cope better in the classroom situation:

> Even if things are murderous I really try to stay calm and not talk so much. (Carl)

He also described how he does this (at the same time revealing *his* manifestation of the part-aspect seven conflict discussed above):

> If my body tells me to leave, my head says, 'no, you stay right where you are!' (Carl)

The second area concerns issues to do with relationships with other people. Hugo, was adopted when he was three and experienced a very traumatic childhood. He often thinks about living in a different family:

> Well, it's silly really… but I dream about having another family, that I was allowed to grow up *properly*, with love and respect. (Hugo)

The third area contains activity related issues. Lars had recently joined a new football team and thinks a lot about this:

> How well I performed at practice, what will happen in the next game, whether I will keep my position… (Lars)

The fourth area consisted of time related issues. These are statements that explicitly contain the words *future*, *past* or *present*.

> I think of, well it is usually about two things, either it is about my future or… something that is close in the future like an exam or something like that. (Camilla)

Finally, the fifth and last area had to do with the world at large. Here issues were usually related to pollution, war and starvation:

Table 3. *EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS in a time perspective*

Time:	The Past	The Present	The Future
Content:			
Oneself		Elias Karl Jonas Lars	Hugo
Relations to others	Hugo	Anders Anna Hugo Julia Karl Made. Lars	Amanda Anders Hugo Julia Lotta Jonas Made. Lars
Activities	Hugo Jonas	Anders Anna Karl Jonas Lars	Amanda Elias Cami. Anders Anna Hugo Julia Lotta Jonas Made. Lars
Time (explicit)	Anders Jonas		Cami. Hugo Jonas Made.
The world at large		Karl Lotta	Lotta

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> The environment, I think a lot about that... and starvation and things... nuclear weapons... and sometimes when you read about the dying forest, then you start to think about how things will be here, maybe in just five years or so. (Lotta)

The most prominent feature in this section of the interviews was the temporal aspect. Our overall impression was that a common theme for many of the respondents had to do with their future. This elicited the next step in the analysis; to place each person on a grid according to content area and time perspective. The results here are reported in Table 3.

Time and content analysis. Table 3 illustrates that activity related issues and issues to do with relationships were discussed by most respondents. Additionally, issues to do with the past were rare, issues to do with the present more common whereas issues to do with the future were represented by all respondents but one. Hence, previous suggestions that existential questions of late adolescence equals future questions (Adamson & Lyxell, 1996) were corroborated. That is, after exploring oneself during the early part of adolescence, forming pictures of oneself in the future appears to be the next step in the developmental process. However, the ability, strength and courage to explore things (whether oneself, oneself in the future or the world at large) vary substantially between different individuals. Allen *et al.* (1984) suggested that adolescent exploration is a function of family relationships. In this study this is exemplified by Hugo, the young adopted man mentioned above. Table 3 indicates that his existential questions are spread widely across the grid including questions of both the past, the present and the future. However, examining the interview transcripts one finds that issues of the past are by far the most common:

> ...so, every summer I saw all the others, my sisters and my brother, go off to pick strawberries, and I wasn't allowed to go... and that is *still* my dream, to go and pick strawberries... in a strawberry field... (Hugo)

His dream is in fact to re-live his childhood in a family who gives him love and respect, and "teaches him what is right and wrong", issues he comes back to throughout the interview. After spending much time debating these subjects, expressing much anguish, he spontaneously starts talking about his future during the very last part of the interview. One way of interpreting this is, that by verbalizing his experiences Hugo was also able to leave them behind. Subsequently he could start exploring the future in the form of different vocational alternatives, visualizing himself as a parent and so forth. Thus, letting go of the past seemed to entail that future issues were raised within the individual. We believe that this is an important step towards the adult identity.

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Adult contacts

This part of the interview contained two questions and the results are presented accordingly.

Question number one, "Please tell me about who the adults in your life are". In response to this first question all subjects started by listing their parents, often making comments about how important they were:

> "If I hadn't had my parents I probably would have been a completely different person... who knows, a real problem child maybe, hanging out with gangs, fighting and stuff... if I hadn't had all the love from my family that I have had." (Anders)

The mothers were particularly often mentioned:

> My Mum, she is really important, she and I have a very close relationship, I hardly ever see my father because he works all the time... we have a different kind of contact, it is more like when we go on holiday... but I can talk a lot about my future with him too... (Amanda)
>
> I suppose it is my Mum and Dad, but I don't have much contact with adults really... I have been thinking about that quite a lot, why me and my Mum don't talk much with each other... there is such a difference with my friend and her mother, they have a real close relationship, that seems really nice... (Lotta)

Other relations such as older siblings, aunts, uncles and grandparents were also listed by most of the participants. Two respondents mentioned adults they had worked with (e.g. summer and weekend jobs) and one girl stated that she had always spent a lot of time with her parents' friends. However, in all, contacts with adults outside the family were scarce. Either one had contact with parents or other close relatives, or one did not mix with adults at all. Also these results are consistent with previous studies (Adamson & Lyxell, 1996).

Although spending substantially more time at school than at home with parents (cf. the average of 9 to 10 hours per week spent with parents; Swarr & Richards, 1996) as many as eight respondents did not mention teachers without being specifically asked about them. The comments were then either negative or indifferent:

> Please don't be offended now, but teachers, I really don't trust them. (Jonas)
>
> I suppose there are the teachers too... but I don't have much contact with them... they are just there... (Madeleine)

Positive comments about teachers usually concerned teachers from the time before college. Thus, these different school types seem to offer different types of social contacts between pupil and teacher. At the high school level these contacts were often perceived as shallow, indifferent and/or solely oriented towards the subject of teaching and grading students.

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Table 4. *Content categories of ADOLESCENT–ADULT CONTACTS in a time perspective*

Type of knowledge & experience	Adult person involved	Time
Personal	Relations second generation back	The past
Interactional	Parents and adults same age or younger than parents	The present & The future
Factual		

Question number two, "Do you need adults in your life and in that case why?". On this question, all respondents stated that they felt a need for adult people in their lives irrespective of what type of contacts they were currently experiencing.

> If I didn't have any adults… I would feel uncertain somehow… and empty… if I didn't have anyone who listened when I wondered about things. (Lotta)

Two answers recurred throughout the interviews, distinguishing the adolescent–adult relationship from relationships with peers; adults' *knowledge* and *experience*. This in turn, could be further divided into three types of knowledge; *personal, interactional* and *factual knowledge*. Also, these different types were connected to certain groups of adults and also involved a dimension of time (Table 4).

Personal knowledge refers to knowledge which has to do with the respondents' personal lives. This is often in the form of family history and frequently connected to the old generation, mostly the grandparents:

> …like my grandfather and those who are old like him, they think in a different way… and he tells me about his childhood and his youth… and that's really exciting and fun to hear about… (Camilla)

Interactional knowledge is related to trust, identification and to the theme of how one is versus should be. Here the parents and adults of the same age or younger than the parents seemed to play an important role. The comments were made sometimes in the present but often in a future perspective:

> They have a lot of experience and see things from a different perspective… they have gone through all the things me and my friends go through right now… they know things and you can trust them… and my Mum, she is just *always* right, isn't that strange? Like *always!* (Julia)

Finally, *factual knowledge*, refers to knowledge about facts and events in the outside world. As in the previous category, adults from the parent generation are mentioned here, as is the time perspective, usually the present or the future:

> …your friends don't know about certain things… like if something is wrong with my pay slip (from his weekend job), then you can ask an adult person… (Jonas)

To summarize this section, adult contacts outside the family were scarce to the majority of the respondents. However, contacts with parents and close family were often described in a warm and positive way, in contrast to descriptions of teachers. Also, all respondents expressed the need for adults in their lives as sources of knowledge and experience.

CONCLUSION

In the present study a qualitative approach was applied to the study of identity development during the late part of adolescence with a specific focus on self-concept, existential questions and adult contacts. The results were derived from twelve adolescents' verbal responses to open-ended interviews.

First, the results of the study both validate and elucidate our previous findings on the subject of adolescents' self-concept. Using a personality inventory (based on two dimensions, love and control; Benjamin, 1974, 1984) Adamson and Lyxell (1997) found that self-love (whether high or low) appeared to be established during earlier developmental periods, whereas questions of inner control were yet to be solved. In the present study, questions of self-love or self-hate were seldom discussed. Instead, a central question to the majority of the respondents concerned how to be and behave in relation to others without giving up too much of their own needs and wishes. That is, the respondents were frequently occupied with controlling, or trying to control, their own behaviors and interactions with other people. These results clarify what *questions of inner control* comprise during this developmental stage and, simultaneously, also illustrate the value of combining qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry.

Second, our interpretations of data were illustrated in a model containing four self-concept dimensions arranged on a continuum of self (intrapersonal issues) vs. others (interpersonal issues) and a continuum of proximity vs. distance. Lifting this model to a more general level it can be discussed in terms of *process* and *result*. Finding a solution to the question of how one is as a person vs. how one should be (i.e., part-aspect number seven) involves reflecting on oneself and on oneself in relation to others. Fitting this central question into the model, we suggest that *the process* of identity development during late adolescence involves transitions among the four self-concept dimensions. In this process, the adolescent needs to possess both an experiencing and an introspecting self-concept dimension, as well as be able to relate to others without losing her/his autonomy.

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Hence, identity development can be viewed as a process of balancing between the intra- and the interpersonal parts of the identity. Bosma *et al.* (1994) suggested that identity should be viewed as a bridge between the self and the other (see also Kroger, 1989). In line with the proposed model, we suggest that identity development during late adolescence also contains building a bridge *within* the individual (i.e., the reflecting me vs. the experiencing me). This bridge opens the way for conscious reflections upon the needs that were previously experienced in less articulate ways. Discussing the model in terms of *result*, we suggest that a positive result of the identity formation process would be to develop flexibility within the model: an ability to move between self and others, proximity and distance, in accordance with each particular situation. That is, by mastering the competence of moving within the model, one masters the ability to keep the right distance both within oneself and between oneself and others. A negative outcome of this process on the other hand, could result in either one of two possible alternatives. First, an inability to leave the experiencing me and constantly act out needs and wishes with no regard for other people. The second alternative would be an extreme sensitivity to other people's needs and opinions about oneself. That is, getting caught in constant introspections would hinder an equally important part of life; that of just living for the moment (cf. the quotation by Lars). The resolution to this conflict can be compared with what Buber (1954, 1995) regarded as the core question of philosophical anthropology; to let your life be ruled by who you are and not by who you wish to appear to be.

In sum, the model provides a framework in which a homeostatic process between the four self-concept dimensions can be pictured. We suggest that flexibility within this model is developmentally related (i.e., it will increase with age), but also that individual differences in the adult identity may be explained in terms of degree of flexibility.

The second area of investigation in the current study was adolescents' existential questions. Focusing on time rather than domain we found that existential questions mainly concerned *oneself in relation to one's personal future*. That is, issues of psychological *integration* rather than *separation* (Ramström, 1991; Grotevent, 1986). In other words, activity related questions (e.g. educational and occupational choice) and relational issues (e.g. partner and children) were usually situated in the future. In addition, the future itself was often mentioned as the most important issue of their lives at the moment ("my questions of life *are* questions of the future" as one respondent answered). These results indicate that although different individuals are mentally occupied with different identity related domains, most of them still have a common denominator: the future. Grotevant (1993) addressed the fact that exploration and commitment do not occur as a simultaneous process across all identity domains. Consequently, in order still to consider identity as a unitary phenomenon, we need to understand better how one domain influences the other. Grotevant (1993) proceeded with introducing an idea that individuals may have a central organizing principle (a leading theme) around which identity development evolves. We suggest that questions of the future could serve as one such theme during this developmental period.

Another question related to the theme of the future, arose in connection with the case of Hugo; what does the *absence* of future related reflections during the latter part of adolescence signify? The empirical picture from the present study indicates that, inability, or resistance, towards visualizing oneself in the future could be connected to problems in the identity formation process. However, this interpretation needs to be further validated by means of quantitative measures before any firm conclusions can be drawn on this subject.

In the final research question adolescents' contacts with adult persons were explored. The results showed that all respondents expressed the need for contacts with adults due to their *knowledge* and *experience*. Further, this knowledge was divided into personal, interactional and factual knowledge. That is, adults can give a sense of personal roots and history, they can teach the adolescent how to be and behave together with other people, and sometimes help out with practical things. In sum, they form a secure base from which the adolescent can explore her/himself and the world (cf. Allen *et al.*, 1984; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Murphey *et al.* 1963; Adamson & Frodi, manuscript in preparation, 1997). Further, we suggest, that interactional knowledge in particular is a link to identity related issues. Here the adolescents seek explicit answers to the implicit question that emerged as a common theme when questions were asked about their self-concept; how best to control one's behavior and interaction with others. Our conclusion is that adult interactional knowledge is an important factor in solving these questions and subsequently in developing one's ability to move within the proposed identity model.

However, adults other than family and relatives were very rarely mentioned. The participants in this study come from a small country town where the majority live close to their relatives. This elicits the question of what happens when relatives are not geographically available. Are they exchanged for other adults or does one turn to peers, for instance, instead? Considering the qualitative difference in peer relations and adult relations that emerged in the present study we suggest that this would influence the identity formation process. As mentioned previously, adolescents' contacts with adult people is a domain that has received little research interest so far. The results of the present study suggest several questions in this field that needs to be answered, in particular those related to the content of adolescent–adult interactions.

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Finally, the question of reliability and validity needs to be addressed. A qualitative analysis can be placed on a continuum stretching from content condensations to elaborate, personally based interpretations. We find that content condensations seldom give rise to extreme differences between different readers, whereas the more interpretive analyses often do. Hence, the latter call for more open presentations than the former, in order to be open for scientific criticism. In the present study, the parts closed for insight have mainly been content condensations (e.g., the purposive sampling method, the step leading to the twelve self-concept dimensions and also the five content areas within the area of existential questions). The parts containing more interpretive analyses however, can most often be followed by the reader in the text. This also meets up with Jensens (1989) proposal of validation as *a process of showing how sense is made*.

In sum, the results of this study indicate that identity formation during late adolescence consists of integrative issues: *to balance and control one's needs and wishes in relation to others'* and *to find a place for oneself in the future*. The results also indicate that one important factor in this process is the availability of adults who are willing to share their *interactional knowledge and experience* with the adolescent. The findings both validate and extend the results of a preceding, quantitative study (Adamson & Lyxell, 1996) examining the same three domains, self-concept, existential questions and adult contacts in late adolescence.

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Study III

Submitted

Identity: A Developmental Study of Adolescents' Self-Concept.

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Running head: ADOLESCENT IDENTITY

Abstract

In this study identity development was studied by comparing 16- and 18-year olds' (n=201) and adults' (n=52) self-concepts, using Structural Analysis of Social Behaviour (SASB). Also, inconsistency of the self-concept was studied in the adolescent group. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and Mann Whitney U tests revealed significant age differences on inner control/interdependence and consistency but not on self-love/affiliation. Inconsistency was significantly related to active suicide attempts. The findings indicate a developmental pattern where a) inner control and consistency are still subject to development and change during adolescence, b) self-love has been consolidated at earlier stages and c), inconsistency should be viewed as an undesirable developmental pattern in this age group.

Identity: A Developmental Study of Adolescents' Self-Concept

Identity development during the latter part of adolescence (i.e., 16-20 years) has previously been studied as the joint results of processes and occurrences within three domains; adolescents' self-concept, existential questions and contacts with adults (Adamson, Hartman, & Lyxell, 1999; Adamson & Lyxell, 1996). The results here show that a central theme to many adolescents concerns balancing and controlling one's own behaviour in relation to others, whereas issues of self-love (or self-hate), do not elicit much spontaneous interest. Further, the inability to describe oneself in a coherent and consistent manner was related to a number of negative variables That is, questions of control and coherence appear to be two important aspects of identity development during late adolescence, in contrast to self-related emotions like self-love or self-hate. In the present study we intend to examine these issues further with specific focus on age related differences of the self-concept of adolescents (16 and 18 years) and adults, with respect to self-love, self-control and self consistency. This will be done by using the conceptual and measurement framework provided by the Structural Analyis of Social Behaviour (SASB; Benjamin, 1974; 1994). The results will be discussed through an identity perspective and the terms identity, self-concept and introject will be used as follows. Identity is used in theoretical discussions and in line with Eriksons' (1968) notions on this subject. The term self-concept is viewed as an identity element, referring to the individual's definition of her- or himself (cf., personal identity as opposed to ego identity; Erikson, 1959). This term is used in relation to the empirical investigations and findings of the study. Introject, finally is defined as the individual's internalized self-concept, and used only in direct relation to the SASB method used in the present study. In the following we will describe the background and underlying rationales of the SASB system and also connect it to present adolescent research based on the Eriksonian paradigm (Ericson, 1968; Grotevant, 1987; Kroger, 1989; Kroger, 1993, Bosma, Graafsma, Grotevant & de Levita, 1994).

The theoretical framework of the SASB system originates from interpersonal theory (Benjamin, 1974), which, in turn, is rooted in theories of social interaction (e.g., Sullivan, 1953; Mead, 1934). Sullivan claimed that personality is formed by a consensual validation between the individual and her/his social environment and, subsequently, that personality cannot be studied isolated from interpersonal situations. This is one of the key features of interpersonal theory, which also posits it close to Erikson's way of describing human development (Erikson, 1959). In Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, identity and identity formation are always tied to the individual's relational (and cultural) context. Further, interpersonal theory views early experience as critical, but the formation and content of the self-concept are also assumed to be subject to development and change across the life span (Henry, Schacht, & Strupp, 1990). Thus, the interpersonal approach places the SASB model close also to contemporary identity research which stresses the view that identity development is a life-long process taking place in the interaction between the individual and context over time (Grotevant, 1986). Hence, we find that the theoretical grounds for the SASB model is compatible and well suited in connection to issues on identity development in Erikson's terms, as well as to more recent identity theories (cf., Bosma et al., 1994; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Kroger, 1989; 1993).

SASB is a method for analyzing interpersonal relations and/or the self-concept, (operationalized as the introject, Benjamin, 1974; 1994). In previous research (Benjamin, 1984, 1987, 1993, 1994; Henry et al., 1990; Rudy, McLemore, & Gorsuch, 1985; Schacht, 1994) the model has been applied mainly on adults, to study and differentiate psychiatric populations, and to describe the psychotherapeutic process (e.g., interpersonal processes between patient and therapist). Adamson and Lyxell (1996) also used it on a group of 18-year olds in relation to their existential questions. As in earlier interpersonal circumplex models (Leary, 1957; Schaefer, 1965) the underlying assumption of the SASB system is that both human behaviour and the self-concept can be described as the joint expression of affiliation (love – hate) and interdependence (enmeshment – differentiation). These two basic dimensions (sometimes labelled just love and control) are applied to three different foci, where the two first (other and self) relate to interpersonal issues, and the third (the introject) to the intrapsychic field (see Figure 1, p. 119. For further details of the model the reader is directed to the methods section.

Affiliation, Interdependence and Consistency/Coherence in Relation to Adolescents' Identity Development

Previous research on adolescent identity development has shown that during this developmental stage a qualitative change in the relationship between the adolescent and the parent (and other adults) takes place (Allen & Hauser, 1996; Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O'Connor, 1984; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). This change is described by Grotevant and Cooper (1986) as an increased symmetry of influence.

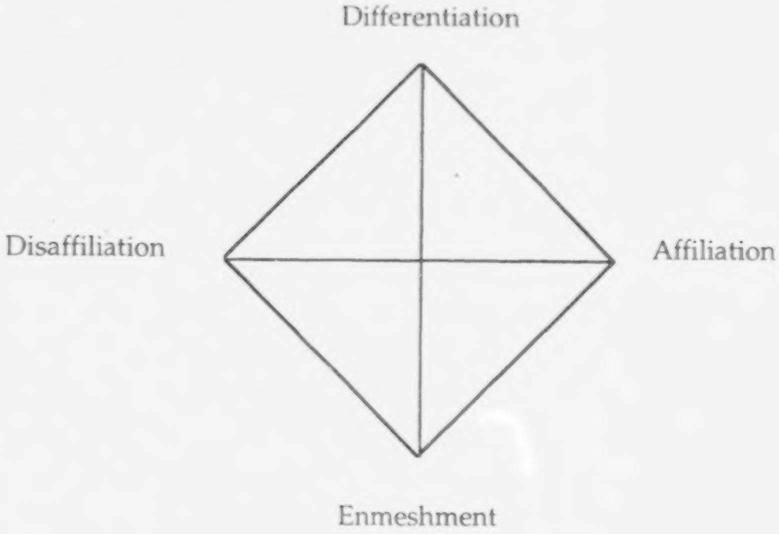

Figure 1. The two basic dimensions of the SASB model.

That is, parental and adult control has to be replaced by a relationship where privileges and responsibilities are shared by both the adolescent and the adult. This process is essential for the adolescent's future integration into adult life. Both Allen et al. (1984) and Grotevant and Cooper (1986), claimed that these changes account for substantial parts of individual differences in development during the adolescent period. In addition, Adamson et al. (1999), found that questions of self-related emotions (i.e., self-love vs. self-hate) did not appear to elicit much interest in 18-year olds. However, balancing and controlling one's own needs and wishes in relation to others' were issues frequently thought about. Thus, we find that questions of emancipation, autonomy and control over oneself and one's life are central issues to the adolescent. In addition, we find that this provides support for making the specific assumption that adolescents will differ from adults on the vertical axis of the SASB model (i.e., interdependence) but not necessarily on the horizontal one (i.e., affiliation). Given the rapid development during the adolescent stage, we also find that the same question should be explored not only between adolescents and adults, but also within the adolescent group itself. To accomplish this, the respondents of this study belong to two age groups, 16 and 18 years, all students doing the first or the last year of their secondary school education.

In addition to discussing the self-concept in terms of affiliation and interdependence, the present study also addresses the issue of unity and coherence of the self-concept. Here there are differing theoretical opinions. Deconstructionalist theories describe the self as multiple, lacking a single, integrative core and in the process of being constantly reconstructed through social interaction (cf., Horowitz, 1979; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Rosenberg & Scara, 1985; Sampson, 1985; Shotter & Gergen, 1989). However, within the psychodynamic approach, self-concept development may instead be viewed as a process of gaining self-knowledge (Baumeister, 1997), where the individual gradually integrates internal images, feelings and theories about the self into a coherent and functioning whole (Erikson, 1959). Hence, the ability to describe oneself in a differentiated yet coherent and consistent manner could be viewed as a sign of a mature self-concept, and subsequently also age related. Contrarily, low consistency would then be related to an immature self-concept. However, Adamson and Lyxell (1996) found that (very) low consistency of the self-concept during late adolescence was linked to a number of negative factors. That is, low consistency appears to be more complex than just indicating immaturity. Thus, instead of viewing consistency as a unipolar dimension reaching from high to low it may be more useful to define it on a bipolar scale where low consistency gradually changes quality into inconsistency. Inconsistency would then indicate a less desirable pattern of development in contrast to low consistency which would be connected to a still maturing self-concept. In the present study, two assumptions are made on the subject of consistency. First, adolescents will assess themselves in a less consistent manner than the adult group and, second, an inconsistent self-concept will be connected to negative aspects of development.

In sum, we will examine four specific assumptions in the present study. First, adolescents' self-concepts will differ from adults' with respect to questions of interdependence but not on questions related to affiliation. Second, adolescents will rate themselves less consistently than adults. Third, these differences will also occur within the adolescent group, that is between 16-year olds and 18-year olds. Fourth, an inconsistent self-concept in the adolescent group will be related to risk factors, in this study defined as active suicide attempts.

Method

Participants. Data for the present study were collected on six different occasions. Respondents were 201 students with the mean age of 16,5 (16-year olds, n=77; f=38, m=39) or 18,5 years (18-year olds, n=124; f=69, m=55) from a Swedish small-town secondary school (44 of the 18 year olds have previously been reported in Adamson & Lyxell (1996), a study focusing on existential questions in relation to the self-concept during late adolescence. This study did not address questions of age differences). The results were compared with a non-clinical sample of 52 adults (f=28, m=24) with a mean age of 33 (range 20 – 56) (Bodlund & Armelius, 1994).

Materials.

The SASB model offers two methods. First, a coding procedure of interpersonal interactions. This method does not include introject ratings, therefore it is not used in the present study and it will not be further discussed. Second, a personality inventory, The INTREX Questionnaire (Benjamin, 1983) which, apart from interpersonal interactions, also includes assessment of the introject.

The model is circumplex using two basic dimensions (see Figure 1, p. 119); affiliation (the horizontal axis) and interdependence (the vertical axis). These two dimensions are divided into 36 points. Each point represents a combination of the basic dimensions and can be described by the equation $|X|+|Y|=1$, where X refers to points on the abscissa and Y to points on the ordinate. In the condensed version, used in this study, the 36 points are collapsed into 8 clusters (see Figure 2, p. 122).

By using absolute values, rather than squares, the model appears in the shape of a diamond, instead of a circle, thus making the poles of the axes more prominent. These poles represent primitive and basic behaviour while points placed further away from the poles are progressively less primitive and more civilized (Benjamin, 1987).

The model contains a passive/active dimension and allows both interpersonal and intrapsychic comparisons. This is done by using three different foci. Focus one, other (sometimes thought of as "parent") represents a transitive focus (i.e., what is to be done to or for another person). Focus two, self (sometimes thought of as "child"), is an intransitive focus (i.e., what is to be done to or for the self). The introject (focus three) represents a pattern of treating the self which, according to the theory, is based on the treatment received by important others, in other words, focus one turned inwards.

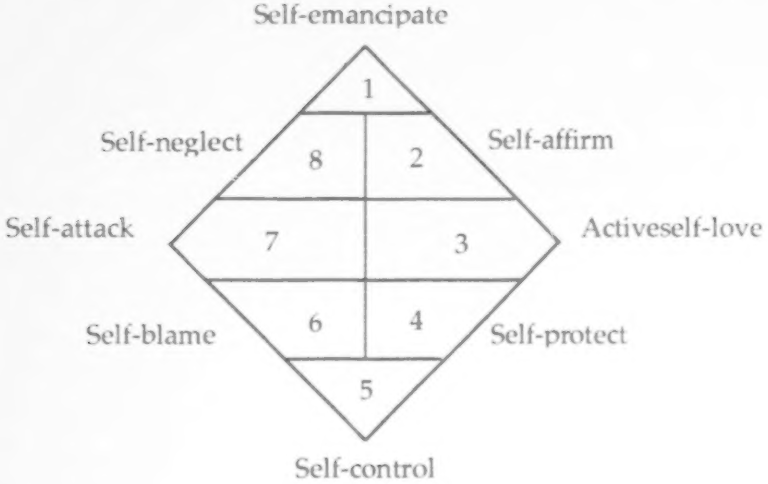

Figure 2. Focus three, the introject, of the simplified SASB cluster model. Adapted from L.S. Benjamin (1993), Interpersonal Diagnosis and Treatment of Personality Disorders. New York: The Guildford Press, p. 54.

In the present study Questionnaire A – the introject, was used. This questionnaire consists of 36 statements where self-ratings are made on a scale from 0 – 100 in steps of ten (see Table 1 (p. 123) for item examples for each cluster). The answer "not at all" represents 0 on the scale, and "perfectly" represents 100. The approach is phenomenological, such that, the outcome is the individual's perception of reality, rather than reality itself.

The results of the ratings are presented in two ways. First, as eight cluster values (ranging from 0 – 100), giving each individual a characteristic profile according to the model. Second, in the form of four coefficients; attack, control, conflict and internal consistency. These represent overall patterns on a) the horizontal axis, b) the vertical axis, c) systematically conflicting patterns on both axes, and finally, d) degree of deviation/consistency with the theoretical model. Values are expressed in the range from -1.00 to +1.00, interpretations of these four coefficients are presented in Table 2 (p. 123).

Test-retest reliability for the American version of SASB is r=.87 on adults (Benjamin, 1984). For the Swedish version, factor analysis shows that 75 percent of the total variance in cluster ratings can be explained by three factors; self-love/self-hate, self-hate and spontaneity/self-control (Armelius & Öhman, 1990). The results refer to adults.

Table 1.
Sample of introject items by cluster.

Cluster	Item
1	Without concern I just let myself be free to turn into whatever I will.
2	Knowing both my faults and strong points I comfortably let myself be "as is".
3	I like myself very much and feel very good when I have a chance to be with myself.
4	I practice and work on developing worthwhile skills, ways of being.
5	I have a habit of keeping very tight control over myself.
6	I accuse and blame myself until I feel guilty, bad and ashamed.
7	I harshly punish myself, take it out on myself.
8	Instead of getting around to doing what I really need to do for myself, I let myself go and just daydream.

Adapted from Henry, Schacht & Strupp (1990), p.771.

Table 2.
Interpretations of the four SASB-coefficients with focus on the introject.

Coefficient	Positive values	Negative values
Attack	self-hate	self-love
Control	self-control	spontaneity
Conflict	self-control/spontaneity	self-love/self-hate
Consistency	stable	ratings near zero or negative; introject is unintegrated/diffuse or ambivalent /conflicted

For a complete description of the model the reader should consult Benjamin (1974, 1981, 1987, 1994), and for the Swedish version, used in this study; Armelius, Lindelöf and Mårtensson (1983), Armelius and Stiwne (1986), Armelius and Öhman (1990), and Öhman (1992). However, in order to facilitate the reading for those who are less informed about its principles, some additional methodological information has been inserted in the Results and Discussions sections.

In addition to the SASB inventory all participants were also asked about suicide attempts.

Procedure.

All groups were asked to participate after they had had a brief information about the purpose of the study they were to take part in. Subjects were instructed not to talk to each other during the test sessions and were allowed 30 minutes to complete the form.

Response rate.

Response rate for the SASB inventory was 100 % and 95% for the question on suicide.

Results

Findings based on the analyses of the eight SASB clusters and the four coefficients are presented separately. Analysis of gender differences was performed on the two basic dimensions. The results were not statistically significant (consistent with findings in adult samples; L.S. Benjamin, personal communication, October 9, 1997), and will not be further discussed in this study.

Effects of Age on Cluster Ratings

The effects of age on scores on each of the eight clusters were assessed by Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA).

The overall MANOVA revealed a significant effect of age on clusters, $F(16, 486) = 5.43$, $p < .05$. Two clusters 1 and 8, yielded significant results on univariate ANOVAS after Bonferroni correction of the significance level ($5/8 = .000625$; cluster 1: $F(2,252) = 17.4$ $p < .05$; cluster 8: $F(2,252) = 16.0$ $p < .05$.). These were further tested by means of Bonferroni/Dunn. The results showed that on cluster 1 (self-emancipate, spontaneous self) both 16- and 18-year olds scored significantly higher than the adults ($p = .0001$ in both cases). The same pattern was found on cluster 8, adolescents scored higher than adults (also here $p = .0001$ in both cases). No significant differences were obtained between 16- and 18-year olds.

In sum, the introjects of both 16- and 18-year olds can be characterized as more self-emancipating and spontaneous and also as more self-neglecting and daydreaming than the corresponding self-ratings in the adult sample. That is, the differences were related to the dimension of interdependence rather than to affiliation.

Coefficient Analysis

Mann-Whitney U tests revealed the following when 16-year olds, 18-year olds and adults were compared on the four SASB coefficients. On the attack coefficient (i.e., the overall measure of affiliation) no significant differences between adolescents and adults were obtained. In addition, no differences were found within the adolescent group.

In contrast, the results of the control coefficient (i.e., the overall measure of interdependence) showed significant differences between 16-year olds vs. adults (z corrected for ties = -6.1 $p < .05$), between 18-year olds vs. adults (z corrected for ties = -4.7 $p < .05$) and also between 16-year olds and 18-year olds (z corrected for ties = -2.3 $p < .05$). The results showed a uniform pattern where the control coefficient was at its lowest amongst the 16-year olds and gradually became higher amongst 18-year olds and adults.

The pattern of the conflict coefficient (i.e., consistent contradiction on one of the two basic dimensions) revealed that adolescents from both age groups scored significantly higher than adults; 16-year olds, z corrected for ties = -2.6 $p < .05$ and 18-year olds; z corrected for ties = -2.8 $p < .05$. No such difference was found within the adolescent group. In addition, the central tendency showed that respondents demonstrating inner conflict did so on the horizontal axis, not on the vertical one.

On the consistency coefficient (i.e., a measure of how consistent with the theoretical model the individual scores), the results showed that both 16- and 18-year olds scored lower than adults; 16-year olds, z corrected for ties = -2.5 $p < .05$ and 18-year olds, z corrected for ties = -2.5 $p < .05$. No difference was obtained between the two adolescent groups. In sum, adolescents showed lower internal consistency than the adult population.

Previous results showed that inconsistency of the self-concept was connected with a number of negative factors (Adamson & Lyxell, 1996). In order to elucidate this issue further respondents of the adolescent groups were divided according to their scores on consistency. Inconsistency was defined as values lower than .50 on the consistency coefficient (i.e., cut off value representing 25% of the variance; L.S. Benjamin, personal communication, April, 17, 1998). This divided the adolescent group in two; consistent respondents n=166 and inconsistent respondents n=35. These were compared as regards to their answers on the question about suicide attempts (note the reponse rate on this question; 95%, leaving 156 consistent and 35 inconsistent individuals). Chi-Square analysis revealed that inconsistent individuals had made active suicide attempts significantly more often than consistent individuals, χ^2 (1, N = 191) = 5.6, $p < .05$.

Two patterns of low consistency are possible; a) low consistency combined with low values on the coefficient of conflict, which would indicate an unintegrated self-concept or b), low consistency combined with high values on the coefficient of conflict, which would indicate an ambivalent self-concept. In other words, an unintegrated self-concept means that high, medium and/or low ratings are scattered unsystematically in the model. Contrarily, an ambivalent self-concept implicates a systematic rating of both high and low values on one of the two axes. To study the issue of inconsistency further, the conflict coefficient was used as a dichotomous variable (conflict vs. no conflict) where conflict was defined as values higher than plus-minus .60 (W. P. Henry, personal communication, April 6, 1998). The pattern which occurred most frequently within the adolescent group was inconsistency – no conflict (n=26). Only a small group displayed the inconsistency – conflict pattern (n=9), and here, all individuals were conflicted on the dimension of interdependence. Again a comparison was made with regard to the question of suicide attempts, and Chi-Square revealed that the combination inconsistency – conflict scored significantly higher on suicide attempts than the combination of inconsistency – no conflict, χ^2 (1, N = 35) = 9.8, $p < .05$. Accounting for the small the number of observations in some of the cells in this analysis the results were still significant; χ^2 with Yate's continuity correction (1, N = 35) = 6.8, $p < .05$, but should still be valued cautiously and mainly serve as indicators for further examination.

The results of the coefficient analyses can be summarized as follows. No differences between the groups were obtained on the attack coefficient. The adolescents' self-concepts were in general characterized by self-love which is also the typical finding in adult non-clinical samples. However, adolescents scored lower than adults on inner control. This pattern reoccurred in the comparison between 16-and 18-year olds. On conflict, adolescents scored significantly higher than adults but there was no difference between 16- and 18-year olds. Finally, consistency was significantly lower in the adolescent group (no difference between 16- and 18-year olds). Further, inconsistency combined with no conflict (i.e., an unintegrated self-concept) was more common than low consistency combined with conflict (i.e., an ambivalent self-concept) in the adolescent group. Finally, respondents with an inconsistent self-concept in the adolescent group scored significantly higher on suicide attempts than consistent respondents.

Discussion

The present study was designed to compare 16- and 18-year olds with adults in terms of affiliation, interdependence and consistency of the self-concept. In addition, inconsistency of the self-concept was examined within the adolescent group. The findings confirm three of the initial four assumptions, whereas the results concerning the proposed differences between 16- and 18-year olds were mixed.

First, as predicted, the adolescents differed from the adults on the dimension of interdependence but not with regard to affiliation. This was confirmed in both the cluster and the coefficient analyses. With respect to the SASB clusters, both 16- and 18-year olds scored significantly higher than the adults on issues of self-emancipation and daydreaming and self-neglect (i.e., clusters 1 and 8). In adult populations high values on the left side of the model (i.e., clusters 6 to 8) indicate a pathological (or less favourable) self-concept (Benjamin, 1974, 1994). However, in the case of adolescents, thinking and daydreaming about oneself in the future has previously been shown to be an important part of identity development (Adamson & Lyxell, 1996; Adamson et al., 1999). Self-neglect on the other hand, may correspond to the omnipotence and feelings of immortality often found in this age group, pathological only in combination with deviant and/or self-destructive behaviour. Thus, both daydreaming and self-neglect may be seen as natural parts of the adolescent way of treating oneself. Our conclusion here is that the *combination* of significantly higher values on clusters 1 and 8 compared to the adult group, together with a *lack* of significant differences on any of the other hostile clusters indicate an age specific pattern connected to the vertical axis of the SASB model rather than being a sign of pathology. This is confirmed by the results of the two pattern coefficients control and attack, where questions of control differentiated the adolescents from the adult group, whereas questions of self-love did not. Further, adolescents showed a significantly more conflicted self-concept with regard to interdependence (rather than affiliation) than adults.

Second, also as predicted, adolescents rated themselves in a less consistent manner than the adults. These results indicate that the ability to rate oneself in a coherent and integrated manner is not yet fully developed amongst 16-year olds, nor amongst 18-year olds. Thus, we find that a developmental pattern can be traced also here ranging from low to high consistency. The issue of consistency vs. inconsistency will be further discussed below.

Third, we proposed that the differences between adolescents' and adults' self-concepts would be replicated in the comparison between 16- and 18-year olds. That is, 16-year olds would score significantly higher than 18-year olds on clusters 1 , 8 and conflict, but lower on control and consistency. The results here were mixed. No significant differences were obtained between the 16- and the 18-year olds on any of the clusters. Neither were any differences concerning conflict or consistency found. However, 16-year olds scored significantly lower than 18- year olds on control. As in the adolescent – adult comparison the coefficient of attack did not differentiate the two groups. Thus, the results here corroborate our suggestion that issues of intrapsychic control/interdependence are intensely processed during this developmental period (running from low to high control), whereas questions of self-love/affiliation are not.

In addition to elucidating developmental trajectories of the self-concept, comparing adolescents with adults, this study also aimed to explore consistency vs. inconsistency of the self-concept in the adolescent group. First, we suggested that consistency should be viewed as a bipolar rather than unipolar dimension. Second, based on theory (Erikson, 1959) and drawing from previous results (Adamson & Lyxell, 1996) we also suggested that having an inconsistent self-concept during the latter part of adolescence would be connected to risk behaviours, here defined as active suicide attempts. These suggestions were confirmed, inconsistency was clearly linked to suicide attempts. In addition, two different groups of inconsistent individuals were found; those with an inner conflict (ambivalent) and those without inner conflict (unintegrated). Interestingly, the ambivalent individuals appeared even more at risk than the unintegrated individuals (however, cell numbers in the Chi-Square analyses were small and these results must be interpreted cautiously). Adding the fact that adolescents rated themselves significantly less consistently than adults, our conclusions here are the following; a) consistency develops with age and is a sign of a maturing individual, and b) inconsistency should be viewed as a negative self concept pattern in this age group.

To summarize, we find that the empirical picture of this study shows that questions of inner control/interdependence are still subject to development and change during the latter part of adolescence, whereas issues of self-love/ affiliation appear to have been consolidated at earlier levels of development. In this study intrapsychic issues were examined. However, using the SASB logic that introject patterns correspond to the patterns of interpersonal relationships, these issues can also be discussed in interpersonal terms. The adolescents' intrapsychic conflict of interdependence, can be interpreted as a mirror image of interpersonal conflicts on these issues between her/him and significant others. Recent identity research emphazises the relational aspect of identity formation (Kroger, 1989, 1993), particularly in relation to issues of autonomy and control (Allen et al., 1984; Allen & Hauser, 1996; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). Adding this to our results, we suggest that future studies on adolescent identity development should extend the use of the SASB model to include also the interpersonal aspects of the method. The intrapsychic world of adolescents would then be linked to her/his relational context in a more explicit way than is the case in this study and, furthermore within the same theoretical model, a condition not found in earlier studies.

Finally, according to Erikson (1959; 1968) one of the major aspects of identity development is constituted by the search for continuity and inner sameness that will bridge the individual's childhood identifications with what (s)he will become as an adult. This search also applies to continuity and sameness across situations, that is, the ability to integrate different roles. The findings of this study are largely consistent with theories (and clinical observations) that advocate the need for unity and coherence of the self-system. However, critique about conclusions based on the internal consistency criteria has been raised. Robins and Oliver (1997) argued that an inconsistent self-concept may suggest a conflict in a person's self-views but also reflect a variability in a person's different behaviours in different roles. That is, the criteria can (on group levels) represent both negative and positive factors. In this study, inconsistency was connected to a factor that must be considered as one of the most serious contradictions to healthy identity development, active suicide attempts. Hence, we find that the results here, together with previous results (Adamson & Lyxell, 1996), clearly indicate that inconsistency of the self-concept during late adolescence should be considered a warning signal.

In sum, we find that the results of this study empirically support theories that emphasize the individual's need for unity and coherence of the conceptual system that defines the self (cf., Erikson, 1959, see also Allport, 1955; Epstein, 1973, 1981; Maslow, 1954, 1971; Rogers, 1950), thereby contradicting theories influenced by a deconstructionalist view (e.g., Horowitz, 1979; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Rosenberg & Scara, 1985; Sampson, 1985; Shotter & Gergen, 1989). Further, we propose that consistency can be a) halted (or slowed down) resulting in an unintegrated self-concept or b) turned in a different direction resulting in a conflicted self-concept. However, these are tentative suggestions in need of further examination together with questions of additional correlates as well as the underlying cause(s) to inconsistency. In all, we find these results the most interesting in this study, stimulating new ideas for further empirical work regarding the patterns of adaptation and transition from adolescence to adulthood.

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